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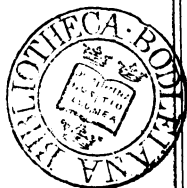
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SELF AND SELF-SACRIFICE,

OR,

NELLY'S STORY.



By ANNA LISLE.



LONDON:
GROOMBRIDGE AND SONS.

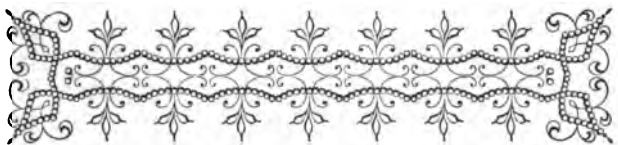
PATERNOSTER ROW.

1856.

249. y. 410.

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PREFACE

It has been said — “He was justly accounted a skilful person who destroyed his victims by bouquets of lovely and fragrant flowers. The art has not been lost; nay, it is practised every day by — the world !” *

If we apply the remark to the “world” of *books*, how very true and forcible does it become ! He who should go among a starving population, and scatter abroad food, tempting indeed to the palate and the eye, yet imbued with the most deadly poison, would be justly condemned as a monster of cruelty. But, suppose that food contained such a poisonous property as would keep its victim in torture for a *life-time*, would not our condemnation be far more severe ?

Reader — *books* are the food of the *soul* ; and some leave it to starve, while others poison it *for ever* ! — not for a year, nor for a life-time, only, but, for all eternity ! Truly, an author’s responsibility is fearfully great ; and he must beware, lest, while weaving the garlands that are to charm and dazzle the sense of those who may catch them as they fall, some leaf from the deadly Upas lurk among the bright and fragrant roses : — nay, it is his duty to furnish, to the best of his power, such mental food as may be, not only harmless, but nourishing.

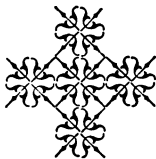
* Bishop Latimer.

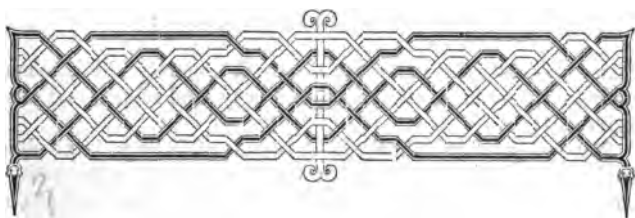
In drawing the characters of Nelly and Edith, I have endeavoured to portray that quiet virtue of SELF-SACRIFICE, so frequently met with, but, alas ! so little appreciated; to render the " beauty of holiness" more attractive than the false allurements of the world; and to shew, that there is but *one* strength that is able to nerve us against temptation.

I have also tried to depict the importance of Early Discipline — and that, too, of a sound religious kind; and I have, to the best of my power, worked out the characters of my two heroines — their virtues and their faults — in accordance with the early training received by each. The childish education of the one tended to promote selfishness — that of the other, the reverse.

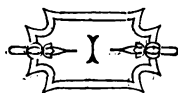
My *duty*, I have, I trust performed; — how perfectly, my Readers will decide. To their verdict, I trust my book.

OCTOBER, 1856.





SELF AND SELF-SACRIFICE.



"It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth."

LAMENTATIONS iii. 27.

"Yes, Aunt Mary; but it is so hard to be good!"

"Ah! Nelly, dear, many children, and many grown-up men and women, have said so before you; and all, from the cradle to the grave, find it very, *very* 'hard to be good.'"

"Oh! Auntie, does *every one* find it so hard? Does *every one* feel angry, and long to be in a passion—I mean, in a great, *great* passion—and—Oh! Aunt, you dont mean that *every one* finds it hard to be good?"

"Yes, my child; *every one*, at times."

"But *you* don't, dear Auntie? You are so good—as good as any one that ever lived! I am sure you must have been *born* good; and I'm quite sure that you never did a wicked thing in all your life—no, not even when you were a little child! Oh! you dont know—you cant *think*—what it is to feel so bad—so wicked!"

And, laying my head in her lap, I sobbed aloud.

"Poor Nelly!"

There was not much in the words; but I shall never forget the tone of voice in which they were uttered. It spoke of a tender affection that had long watched over me—of a sympathy that had been with me through all my childish sorrows—of a yearning depth of affection which I had thought none could ever feel for me.

"Dear Auntie!"

I looked in her face, and saw that her eyes were filled with

tears. Tears—for *me!*—the despised, ungainly child, whom none loved—whom all pronounced ugly, and selfish, and disagreeable!

My own grief was checked. A tumult of feelings, impossible to describe, kept me silent. It was so new—so wonderful—that any one should feel an interest in *me!* that any one should grieve for *me!* I knew not what to think; I only knew that I adored Aunt Mary; and again and again I kissed the hand that was passed caressingly round my neck. At last she spoke:—

“Nelly, it is true that *none* are good—‘no, not one’—for God has said so; but all can *try* to be good, and can pray to God to make them so; for ‘without His help we can do nothing.’ When I was a little child, I used sometimes to feel as you do now, and I hardened myself against good advice, and thought it a fine thing to shew ‘spirit’ (as I called it)—and I grew up to be very self-willed and passionate; and if I had died then, how dreadful it would have been! But, Nelly, darling, God is more merciful to us than we are to ourselves; so He sent me bitter trials and afflictions, and took from me many things that were dearer to me than life; and so, when trouble and sorrow had humbled my rebellious spirit, I learned to submit myself to Him who would have been able to console me in far greater trials than those which He so mercifully sent me.”

“But, Aunt Mary, there’s one thing I can’t understand—”

“Well, dear, what is it?”

“Why—you say that God loves us *all*—yes, *all*; He loves you, who are so good—more good than any one that ever was born—yes, I think more good than even those very, very good men and women in the Bible! I can quite believe that God loves *you*;—but how can He love *me*? They all say, I am so ugly, and naughty, and deceitful! But as you say that He *does* love me, I will try to think so. Yet that is not what I was thinking of: what I want to know is this—if God *does* love me, why doesn’t *He* make me good at once? Why doesn’t He put good thoughts into my heart, so that I shall find it easier to be good than naughty? And why doesn’t He give me beautiful golden hair, and beautiful eyes, and a white skin, and a little mouth, so small that you could hardly see it, and a voice—oh, Aunt! I heard those ladies who were here the other day, talking of my little sister; and they said all that

of her—and they said that she was more like an angel than a child, and that ‘to look at her was to love her’—and they never noticed *me*; so I ran out to the brook, and sat down on the bridge, and wished I were dead. And then I wondered why God had made Edith so pretty that no one could help loving her, and why He had made me so ugly. And then I felt very angry, and I determined to be naughty, and I hated Edith—and I hate her now,—her, and mamma, and those ladies, and —”

“ Oh, Nelly!”

“ Well, Auntie, I won’t say it, then;—but *do* tell me all these things that I want to know.”

“ My dear Nelly, it is not very easy to explain ‘all these things’; but I will try. You say that you cannot understand how God can love you; yet He *does* love you, though He hates the evil that is in you. If you read your Bible, you will find in every page some proof of God’s wonderful love for man—not merely for the good and obedient, but also for the wicked and ungrateful. You will there read that He has, over and over again, pardoned their faults, and tried to lead them to do well; and they would not listen to Him, but chose rather to follow their own wicked devices. He has even said, ‘Ye *will* not come unto me’;—and again, ‘How often would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye *would* not.’ How He bore with the disobedience and ingratitude of the Jewish people!—indeed, their ingratitude seems to have been only surpassed by His love and forbearance. How He led them through dangers and difficulties; defeated their enemies, who were as the sand of the shore for multitude; and finally, placing them in ‘a land flowing with milk and honey,’ made of them a great and glorious nation! And what return did they make for so much love? They murmured against Him repeatedly, and at last forsook Him for senseless blocks of wood and stone. And then He saw that they would be lost for ever if He did not send them some punishment to humble them, and make them feel that He was their God, and that without Him they could do nothing. You know that parents (*good* parents, I mean) always correct their children when they do wrong, because they know that, unless they are good, they can never be happy: in the same way God, who is the Parent of us all, corrects us for our welfare when we go astray. And there is this difference

between the correction of an earthly and of a heavenly parent: — a father or a mother cannot look into a child's *heart*, and read its *thoughts*, and a child is therefore not always understood by its parents; they can only judge by *appearances*, and then act for what they think to be for the best. But *God* can see into the *heart*, and can read every thought in it more easily than you can read a book; and therefore He *cannot* be mistaken, but always knows *exactly* what degree of correction is necessary to make us repent and turn to Him. So He allowed them to fall into captivity, and they suffered great troubles until they repented, and then He had mercy on them, and drew them out of captivity; but they never again became the same great nation they had been before, because prosperity would have hardened their hearts, and they would again have rebelled against Him. And we read, 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish.' He gave 'His *only* Son!' and they despised and persecuted Him, and put Him to death!—this beloved Son, whom their God had sacrificed for their salvation! And did He then utterly reject them, and blot them from the face of the earth? No; He still held out promises of future benefit; and we have His word that, despite all their disobedience and ingratitude, He will yet make a great nation of them at the last. Oh! Nelly, never again doubt God's love!"

She paused for a moment, and I felt her tears falling upon my neck. I looked up in her face, illuminated by the dazzling radiance of the setting sun; and, for a moment, I fancied she was an angel, and could have worshipped her. Soon she resumed:—

"And you ask me, darling, why, if God loves us, and really *wishes* us to be good, He does not *make* us so—since He *could* do so if He chose? Now, Nelly dear, it has puzzled many wiser and better people than myself to answer this question; but is it not enough for us to know that God *must* act for the best? What right have *we* to ask why He does this, or that, or the other? Suppose the worm were to question God's wisdom because He made it crawl on the ground, instead of walk? Suppose your little baby-sister were to say that her mamma was very silly not to let her sit up till ten o'clock at night, or do anything else that she thought would be very consistent and very wise? Suppose *you* were to find fault with the sayings and doings of grown-up people? All this would be

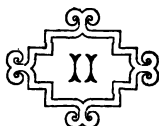
very absurd, but not half *so* absurd and wicked as to question the wisdom and mercy of Almighty God in His dealings with fallen, rebellious man! But, dear, you must remember that your heart is not open to *good* influences only;—we are told that ‘Satan goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour’; that is, he puts wicked and rebellious thoughts into our hearts, and they drive away all our good feelings and resolutions; and so we sin.”

“But, Aunt, why does not God *kill* Satan?”

“My child, he is an immortal spirit, and God has ordained that such *cannot* die. It is enough for you to know, that if you obey and love God, and continue earnest in prayer to Him, He will never allow you to fall under the dominion of Satan; and that though you may transgress again and again, He will, on your repentance, forgive you for the sake of Jesus Christ.—But now, dear, we have had a long talk, and it is time you were home; so good night.”

I received her kiss, and, leaving her, went on my way, thinking on all she had said, and wondering why God didn't take her up to heaven at once, as He did the holy prophet long ago; for it seemed impossible one so good should die, and be laid in the earth. But here I remembered what she had told me about questioning God's purposes; so I wondered no longer, but entered the house.





“Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.”—ECCLESIASTES.

AND now I must describe it—the dear, old-fashioned house, with all its ins and outs, and its long passages—with other passages leading out of them, and that, too, so sharply, that a stranger was always taken by surprise, and was sure to exclaim, “Well—I never *should* know my way about this house!” Then, the dark nooks and corners that one fell upon here and there—they seemed made for no conceivable purpose, unless for the harbouring of ghosts (in the existence of which uncomfortable phenomena I had, as a child, most unswerving faith). But I must not go off into rhapsodies, as I always feel inclined to do, while describing the dear old place—the scene of so much sorrow, and of such intense happiness—forgetting that its hallowed associations would render it in my thoughts a paradise, even were it the most ordinary spot on the face of the earth. The house, except at the front entrance, which was approached by a drive, was surrounded on all sides by grounds—*such* grounds! What words could convey the faintest idea of their exquisite beauty? They descended, in terraces and mossy slopes, till they were lost to the eye amidst groves of the densest foliage. Here and there the bright river peeped forth, like a brilliant serpent gliding through the emerald verdure of the grass and trees, until at last it emptied itself into a lake, deep, dark, and still. From this lake forth ran a brook, tumbling and leaping—a mimic cataract—over a rough precipice of rock and earth, till at last it fell into the sea, which beat upon the sand and rocks at the foot of the hill on which we lived. The large stately drawing-room

overlooked this magnificent view. Six French windows opened on a balcony, from which a broad flight of steps conducted to the terraces.

Before continuing my narrative, I must tell you, that I was an orphan. My mother died shortly after my birth; and my father, a few years afterwards, married again. Twelve months before the period of which I write, he also died, leaving one child by his second marriage—a little girl of extraordinary beauty. And now I will continue: first telling you, that you must suppose me to be a warm-hearted, impetuous, self-willed child, nine years of age; my little sister, Edith, was only three—six years my junior.

On entering the morning-room, in which we generally sat when we had no company, I found my mother reading a story-book to little Edith, who was sitting in her lap. Fresh from my late conversation with Aunt Mary, I was determined to be good, and to give no cause of offence; so, in order not to interrupt the reading, I sat down in a window seat, and listened to the tale. When it was concluded my mother looked up, and saw me, and, addressing Edith, said coaxingly:—

“Now, darling, you promised to go to bed directly your sister came in; so go, like a good child.” And she rang the bell for the nurse.

“Nasty, tiresome Nelly, to come back! I wish she had’n’t come in!” and the little girl pouted, and looked at me as though she bore me no especial good will.

“Now, go, darling—and to-morrow you shall have a ride on the new pony!” (she did not say, “Go, *because I tell you.*”)

“Nasty, ugly Nelly, to come back!” and, with this concluding malediction, the child went away with her nurse, shaking her shoulders from side to side, as I have often seen children do when afflicted with a fit of ill-humour which they have all the will, without the power, to wreak on every person and thing that comes in their way.

During this scene I had in vain struggled for self-control. At last, when the fatal word, “ugly,” burst from Edith’s lips, I could bear it no longer; and my wounded pride—or rather *vanity*—broke forth in the passionate exclamation—“I *hate* you!”—when I suddenly remembered my mother’s presence, and, looking up, met the cold crushing glance that she cast upon me.

My mother never looked *angrily* at me — never gave way to an intemperate word or action towards me; her demeanor was ever the same — calm, cold, and dignified. Once, when she had shewn me some little act of indulgence, I, in an excess of gratitude, had forgotten the chill reserve that had always cast its icy barrier between us — and had thrown my arms round her neck, and kissed her. I shall never forget what followed. She recoiled, as if I had been a serpent, or some loathsome thing; I even felt her whole frame *shudder*, as she almost *threw* me from her; and in her eyes I read that she *hated* me! Terrified — bewildered — I fell at her feet, and gasped forth,

“Oh! mamma — mamma — don't be angry! I didn't know it was naughty! I won't do it again! Oh! *don't* be angry with me, mamma!”

She had already recovered her usual self-command.

“I am not angry, Eleanor; but I do not like these violent outbursts of feeling; they are not ladylike, and I beg that you will restrain them.”

And that night I had gone to my little room, and, amidst tears and sobs such as a *child* should never know, had prayed God to kill me — since mamma would never love me, and I had no one in the world to care for. For I had loved this new mamma with a depth — an intensity of affection — such as I had never felt for any one else. She was so beautiful, and had such a *grand* look, I thought, that I used to long to kneel down and worship her! She was still young, then — only twenty-six — and had a face and form that I have never seen surpassed. The rich, glossy braids of her raven hair were gathered in heavy folds at the back of her most classically shaped head. Her complexion was like marble — hardly a tinge of color varying its intense whiteness. Her eyes — black as night — large — full — lustrous! Their size and brilliancy would have been painful, had they not been softened by lashes, almost incredibly long, which, at times, gave to her face an expression of feminine softness that was perfectly irresistible. Her mouth — ah! what character there *is* in a mouth! the most ordinary expression of hers was that of indomitable and unbending pride; but when her glance fell upon her little child, it changed to one of deep and womanly softness; and then her face was angelic. She had one other look — but this was for *me* alone, and I never

saw it called forth by any one else; it was a look of intense coldness, with a faint shade of repulsion, which I could *feel*, but could not *define*. This manner of hers never varied. I should have felt less pained if she had sometimes shewn herself angry with me; but no—she seldom reproved me, even when I needed it, and only seemed to desire as little as possible of my presence; so long as I was not actively disobedient, she did not notice me. Now, however, when I ventured thus boldly to vituperate her petted darling, I expected that she would not allow me to pass unpunished. Half frightened—half defiant—I stood, awaited my doom. Her manner was but a little colder than usual.

“Eleanor, you should not give way to this excess of temper. Learn to restrain yourself.”

Blazing with indignation at what I thought the keenest injustice on her part, I retorted—

“Then why do you let her call me ‘Nasty, tiresome Nelly’—‘Nasty, ugly Nelly’? Why do you let her abuse me, and then scold me for answering? I hate her, and you too! You are not my *own* mamma—my own, dear, beautiful mamma!—and I don’t love you, and I wish you and Edith——” and here, utterly beside myself, I stamped with rage.

Still my mother was calm and dignified.

“Leave the room, Eleanor!”

Her quiet self-possession awed and impressed me. I obeyed. I sped rapidly along the corridor, ascended the stairs, and, threading the various passages above, entered a room of moderate size, which had served my father for a study. It was hung with dark green; and the carpet was of a sombre hue. Round the walls were book-shelves, filled with books, which had never been opened since his death. The chairs, sofas, etc., were all of a gloomy color; and the whole room wore such an air of sadness, and of “long—long ago,” that, when I had one of my moody fits, I found it more congenial to me than any other room in the house.

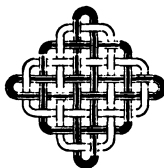
At one end of this chamber was a large fire-place, surmounted by a strange, antiquated, carved chimney-piece, so strange, so old, that I have spent whole hours in staring at the quaint, grotesque figures with which it was ornamented; and in inventing long histories for every one of them—aided chiefly, I must confess, in these flights of imagination, by

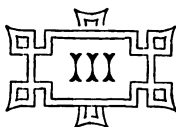
sundry books of fairy lore, which I was much in the habit of studying.

But enough of the old chimney-piece.

Over it was a picture—the portrait of a lady,—very young, and very beautiful. Stay—I will describe her.—Hair, of the richest brown, drawn up in waves from her pure, white brow, and then falling in wild and beautiful luxuriance behind her small, delicate head; smooth, and yet expressive eye-brows—so dark, that you would at first think them black; lashes, dark as night;—and, under them, such *wondrous* eyes!—not black, as you would imagine—but grey—such as look violet at night; clear—large—bright—with such an intensity of expression, that to gaze into them was like looking into wells of unfathomable depth. Her mouth—so small, yet so expressive; the perfect contour of her small, oval face; the long, graceful, swan-like throat! And her form—so slight and girlish, yet so supple and undulating!—Ah! reader—forgive me! You cannot feel as I do. Perhaps you have already divined—this was—*my mother!*

And that night I passed like many others, kneeling before this cherished likeness of the past—looking on the young, bright, joyous face, glowing with the rich tints of health and youth;—wondering if *she* had ever been unhappy—thinking of all that I would have done for her if she had lived—thinking, that, since I was her *own* child, she would have loved me, though I *was* so ugly, and stupid, and awkward;—thinking—thinking—till I fell asleep.





"I loved to walk where none had walked before,
About the rocks that ran along the shore;
Or far beyond the sight of men to stray,
And take my pleasure when I lost my way."

CRABBE.

WHEN I awoke next morning, a brilliant sun was streaming in at the window, the birds were twittering and chirping in a fever of delight, and all nature seemed so gay and happy, that I felt myself irresistibly imbued with its cheering influence. My own room adjoined the one in which I had passed so sorrowful a night; so, entering it, I effected a hasty toilet, and then descended the great stair-case, on my way to the garden. As all the doors were barred and locked, and I was not strong enough to undo them, I effected my egress by the simple process of jumping from the sill of a window, which I managed to open; this operation was achieved at the cost of a large rent in my frock—but, nothing daunted, I joyously bounded forward, over the smooth, closely shaven grass. Leaving behind me the trim borders, well kept gravel walks, ponds for gold fish, chinese pagodas, tents, fountains, and all the other adjuncts of an ornamental flower garden, I shaped my course towards the wild, uncultivated portion of the grounds, running swiftly up and down the mossy slopes, and leaping over every obstruction in my path, till I came to the lake, at the side of which a little boat lay moored. Springing into this, I was soon on the opposite bank, and running along the side of the stream, which flowed towards the sea. Soon, I gained the edge of the cliff, and, after making a rather hazardous descent, found myself at last at my journey's end.

This desired haven was a lonely little bay, completely shut in by rocks, over which the sea beat, in stormy weather, in awful surges; it was then impossible to descend the cliff, which was not high. In fine weather, however, it was a peaceful, enchanting, little spot; and here I spent the greater part of my leisure hours. This, for many reasons, was my favourite haunt.—In the first place, I looked upon it as my own, exclusive property—no one but myself having, to my knowledge, set foot on its sacred ground. I considered myself the early discoverer, and imagined that no other person had any right to its possession; and most jealously did I preserve the secret of its existence, lest any profane footstep should violate the sanctity of its hallowed precincts. Since then I have seen many bays, and many scenes that are, no doubt, far more worthy of notice; but not one of them has effaced from my heart the memory of that little tranquil spot.

And here, in the long summer days, I used to sit for hours, rejoicing in my solitude, utterly oblivious of everybody and everything, as happy as a bird. Ah! those days of hope and trust—of trust in the reality of the present, unmixed with dread for the future!—days that we see but once in our life's journey—a trust and hope that we feel when we are young, but how seldom *after*!

This morning, in particular, I felt more than usually gay and light-hearted. The sorrow of the previous night had passed away, as children's sorrows do; I was too well accustomed to such scenes for them to weigh long upon my spirits; and the exhilaration of feeling produced by my run in the fresh morning air, imparted its tone to all around me. I thought the sea had never looked so blue; and its little rippling waves sparkled so intensely, that I fancied the sun must be trying to turn them into diamonds; as they broke in faint murmurs on the pebbles at my feet, the sound was so soft and musical, and so enchanting, and I was so happy, that a feeling of ineffable serenity stole over me, and I wished that this little spot were the world, and I the only creature in it.

"And then, little waves—dear little waves! how happy we would be together!—no crying—no lessons!"

Here an awful thought flashed across me, dashing to the ground my castles in the air, and making me forget sun, sky, waves, everything.—Lessons! The sun was already so high, that I felt it must be almost breakfast-time, after which I

should begin my daily trial and affliction. I should then adjourn to the school-room—and I had forgotten to learn my lessons!

Springing like a mad thing up the cliff, I dashed on wildly, gained the boat, crossed the lake, and never slackened my pace till I reached the house; then racing up the steps of the balcony, I presented myself in the parlour, where breakfast was already half finished. My mother looked displeased—

“Where have you been, Eleanor?”

I did not answer.

“Sulky,” she observed to the governess.

She was wrong; I was frightened and out of breath, but not sulky. She continued—

“Very few mothers would allow children to sit at table with them; most children of your age are in the nursery. But, since I *do* allow you this favour, I expect to find you sensible of it; and, therefore, I tell you, that I am seriously displeased at your presenting yourself before me when breakfast is nearly concluded, and then in a manner which offends me extremely. Your hair is unbrushed, your dress torn; you are heated, excited; you have altogether the appearance of a low, vulgar person, and your presence, under such circumstances, is extremely disagreeable to me.”

She always seemed to forget that I was a *child*; she always treated me as if I were of her own age, but immensely her inferior. She had no consideration for faults and failings that are natural to a child—at least, not so far as *I* was concerned. I was indignant. I had entered the house expecting reproof, and resolved to submit to it; but I was not prepared for so severe a trial of my patience as this was. I angrily retorted:—

“And you *would'nt* have me at the same table with you, only that Edith is there—and she is six years younger; and you *dare* not send me to the nursery while such a baby is in the parlour!”

She turned to the governess—“This child really becomes worse and worse! Can *you* do nothing with her, Miss Lambert?”

Miss Lambert was a quiet, timid, lady-like person, very well educated, and, to the best of her power, most conscientious in the discharge of her duty; but she was sadly wanting in discernment and knowledge of character; and how much

of this is needed in those who undertake the education of children!

So poor Miss Lambert looked distressed and uneasy, and could only reply:—"Eleanor is certainly a very odd child; but I hope she will amend."

(What a fool I thought her.)

She added:—"When she has finished her breakfast, we will go to the school-room."

A minute before, I had hated my mother for being unjust; I now hated Miss Lambert much more, for being a fool.

"I don't want breakfast, so I can go to the school-room at once; only it will be of no use, for I don't know my lessons one bit."

"Then, you will have to learn them after school-hours!"

And so I went to the chamber of torture, and plodded through weary hecatombs of learning—spelling, grammar, geography, arithmetic, French—how I hated them all!—and sat there, *trying* not to think of the birds that were chirping joyously out of doors, nor of the green banks, nor of the boat that floated so pleasantly on the lake; nor of my darling bay, with its little merry waves.

We always dined early, when we were alone, and also had an early tea; after which my mother generally took a little stroll in the garden with Edith, before sending her to bed.

Well, I finished my lesson, and had my dinner. It was a half holiday; but as I had forgotten to learn my lesson in the morning, there was no holiday for me. However, as a great favour, I was allowed to take them with me into the garden, on my promising to know them by tea-time. Perhaps you will fancy that I went straight to my beloved bay? Oh, no! *that* hallowed spot was never desecrated by the presence of my tormentors! I carried them off to a part of the grounds where the brook was spanned by a rustic bridge. It was a very lovely spot. Over-head, the lofty trees united their dense foliage, and excluded every ray of sunshine. Dark green banks of moss sloped down on either side of the stream, and the brook rippled noisily over the sharp flints that lined its bed. I liked this place; it was very beautiful—but not *so* beautiful as my *own* retreat. *Others* invaded the quiet of *this* spot; *that* was *sacred*! Here, the brook was a *mere* brook—the stones were *mere* stones—there was no hallowed association connected with either of them; so I sat down com-

posedly, and applied myself to my tasks. It was with me a point of honour—or rather, perhaps, of *pride* (alas! how often, even with adults, are the terms synonymous!)—never to break a promise; so I learnt my lessons by tea-time, and said them to Miss Lambert's satisfaction. She commended me; and her praise, joined to a feeling of inexpressible relief at being rid of my tormentors, made me feel inclined to be amiable to every one. My mother, as usual, did not notice me; but my little sister looked so pretty and loveable that I made an overture to her. Drawing from my pocket a large white scallop-shell, I offered it to her.

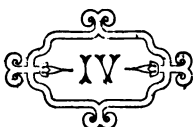
"Thank you, Nelly," said the little girl, who (except when she was put out) was always very polite.

I felt gratified by this appreciation of my offering, and added:—"And I will go out with you after tea, and we will play with it; and you shall be a man keeping a shop, and you shall sell potatoes (berries, you know), and the shell shall be the measure, and it will be great fun—wont it, Edie?"

"Yes," said Edie.

And so we went out, and had "great fun;" and little Edith told me, in confidence, that she was sorry she had called me "Nasty, ugly Nelly" (she had forgotten it; but I recalled it to her)—that she thought me not at all "nasty," but very "nice"; and that I wasn't ugly at all, but very beautiful. Then, by way of parenthesis, I related to her as much as I could remember of the story of "The Fair One with the Golden Locks," and asked her candidly whether she thought me as beautiful as that lady; whereupon she enchanted me by her assurance that I was much *more* beautiful. Overcome with delight, I kissed her again and again, and promised to bring her, on the morrow, a more beautiful shell than any she had ever seen before. So great was my enthusiasm, that I even began to entertain the thought of confiding to her my cherished secret; but just at this moment we were called in, and then Edith went to bed—not, however, till I had made her promise never again to call me "Nasty, ugly Nelly."





"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"—MICAH vi. 8.

I LEARNT my lesson that night, and early next morning repaired to my favourite haunt, where I set to work to find the shell I had promised Edith. I succeeded to admiration, and, having pocketed my treasure, returned home, *determined* to be good all through that day, and luxuriating in the happy consciousness of being well "up" in my lessons, neat in my dress and hair—in short, that all was likely to go well with me that day. I entered the room, as usual, by the French window. The moment my foot was inside, I felt it tread on something, and heard a crash. In an instant there was a scream from Edith.

"Oh! my doll! my beautiful, new, large, wax doll! Oh, mamma, she's trodden on my doll's face! Nasty, stupid Nelly! Oh, my beautiful doll!"

Really sorry for what I had done, I tried to console her; but she ran screaming from me to her mamma.

"I'm so sorry, Edie! Poor little Edie! But I will save up all my money, and buy you another doll—the largest I can get—indeed I will. And here's the beautiful shell I promised you. Isn't it a beauty? Do kiss me Edie, and say you're not angry!"

But the little thing was fairly enraged. Dashing the shell from her, she stamped it to powder, exclaiming—

"Nasty, ugly, stupid Nelly!"

My feelings underwent a complete change. I was losing my self-command. Again these words—"Ugly—stupid—nasty!" Yet I might have forgiven *them*; but to reject my

shell, freshly gathered from my sacred retreat!—to trample upon, and insult it, as if it had been brought from any common bay! Clenching my hands, to keep down my rising indignation, I exclaimed, with flashing eyes, and a voice, choking with suppressed anger,—

“I will never love you again! I will never give you anything again! I will never play with you again!”

My mother here interposed.

“Eleanor, you are speaking in a manner very unbecoming in a little child. With that baby, it is different—she is *only* a baby; but *you* are old enough to know better. Do not answer me. You know that I do not like scenes. Eat your breakfast.”

I was silent; but my blood boiled. All that day I was sulky and morose. My feelings were ajar, and I did not go to the little bay. In the evening I wandered out again. How different was this evening from the one before! How peacefully my little sister and I had played together! As I thought of it, my eyes filled with tears. I tried to restrain them, but it was useless—they *would* flow; and hiding my face in my clasped hands, I gave way to a passionate fit of sobbing.

“Nelly, darling, what is it? What has happened?” said the dear, kind voice of Aunt Mary.

I could not speak.

“Hush! my darling—my poor, little darling—dost cry so—it pains *me* to hear you.”

She held me in her arms—she parted back the heavy masses of hair from my aching brow—she kissed me again and again—and, finally, soothed and comforted me so much, that I told her all that had happened; all my struggles with myself—all my resolutions to be good and patient—all—all! and then I wept again, but not so bitterly as before.

After a little while, I added—

“But, Aunt, I was n’t crying so much because of what happened this morning, as because——”

“Well, dear, because of what?”

“Will you promise not to think me foolish?”

“I dont think you are going to say anything foolish; so tell me at once, darling.”

“Well, Auntie, it is this. I do so long to have some one to love me! No one loves me. I suppose I am too ugly and

stupid! I long for it, more than for anything in the whole world; and I *have* longed for it all my life. I tried to make mamma love me; but she never did; and now I know she never will. Then I tried to make my sister love me; and yesterday I thought she did; and when I lay down in bed, I could n't sleep for thinking of all the things I would do to make her happy—and how I would give every one of my books and playthings, and do all that she wished me to do. Oh yes! I would have been her slave, if she would only have loved me! But she does n't—she can't! Poor little thing! it is n't *her* fault; I'm so ugly and stupid! she *can't* love me!"

And here I sobbed again.

The gentle hand was placed caressingly on my head. The mild, blue eyes were bent fondly upon me!

"Silly child, to attach any importance to the words or actions of such a baby as Edith!"

"Oh, but nobody *can* love me!"

I was drawn closely to her heart. I felt her kisses on my brow, and cheek, and lips.

"Nelly, I love you."

I looked up.—"Do you, Aunt Mary? How good of you! But you love *every body*; they all say — 'Aunt Mary loves all the world.' You mean, that you *pity* me."

"No, my darling; I mean, that I love you better than 'all the world'—better than any one else in the world—better than friends—fortune—life itself! Were you my own child, I could not love you better than I do!"

A sensation of intense, unspeakable bliss, was stealing over me. I struggled against it. I had been disappointed so often, that I could not trust to this fresh promise of happiness. I looked wondering in her face.

"And dont you think me naughty and stupid, and deceitful, and ugly?"

"My darling!—no; I think you the best and dearest child in the world! You are always good, with *me*!"

"Oh, Aunt dear; it is so easy to please *you*!"

"And as to your being ugly," she continued, "you are certainly *not* so. I should love you just as well if you were; and it is of not much consequence to a little girl whether she is plain, or the reverse:—but, since you take it so much to heart, I tell you that you are not ugly, and that I think you quite as good-looking as your little sister."

"Dear Aunt Mary!—and may I love you very, very much? and will you *never* turn against me?"

"Never, my darling!"

"Oh, Auntie, I am *so* happy! But why are you so good to me? and what *can* you see in me to be so fond of?"

"My darling Nelly, you are such a dear, affectionate, grateful child, that I should have loved you wherever I might have met you; but, beyond that, your poor mother was my friend; we grew up together, as sisters, and were all the world to each other: and when she died, she commended you to my care. If I have not told you all this before, it was because I wanted you to turn all your affection towards your new mamma, and your little sister. I thought it best for your interest. But now, my pet, you must look upon me as the best friend of your poor, lost mother. Will you promise me, never again to sit and cry as you did this evening?—never, at least, *alone*?"

"Yes, dear Auntie—I never will: I will always run straight to you when I am in trouble."

"And now, dear Nelly, it is getting late; time for all little girls to be in bed. I will just go in with you, and ask your mamma to let you spend to-morrow (as it is Sunday) with me; and then I will say good-night."

So we went in together, and, the required permission being granted, my aunt kissed me, and went home. Edith was in bed. My mother was alone. I felt so softened—so utterly at peace with all the world, that I said, as I left the room—

"Good-night, *dear* Mamma?"

"Good night, Eleanor," said my mother, in her usual cold, calm tone of voice.

Such a repulse did not daunt me.—Aunt Mary loved me "as if I were her own child"! Aunt Mary loved me "better than all the world"! I ran up-stairs; but, before gaining my own room, looked in at my little sister's door.

She was sleeping peacefully—her little rosy cheek resting upon her hand. She looked so innocent and pure—so helpless in slumber—that I stooped down to kiss her. I suppose this had been her nurse's last act before the child fell asleep, and that she had kissed her when she had finished her simple prayer; for the little thing half woke, looked at me dreamily, and repeated the words, "Pray God, bless mamma, and Aunt Mary, and little Edie!" I kissed her again; and this

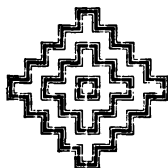
time she knew me, and, throwing her arms round my neck, said:—

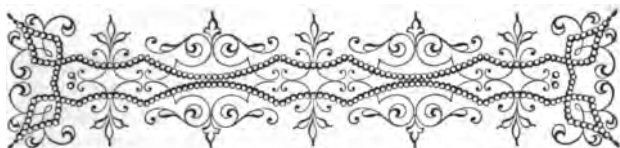
“Pray God, bless Nelly—poor Nelly—who has no one to love her! Poor Nelly!”

And she fell asleep.

Little darling! After all, then, she was sorry for me; and, perhaps, was fond of me, when nothing happened to put her out. And then, she was such a baby! and no one ever reproved her for being naughty!

That night I was disposed to make excuses for everybody, and to look upon everything in the brightest colours. How I loved Aunt Mary! Before I slept, how many wonderful schemes I devised in her behalf! At last, I did sleep, and dreamt that she was a queen—that I had told her my secret, resigned my kingdom to her, and that she reigned there, while I was her slave.





Her home was but a cottage home,
A simple home, and small;
Yet sweetness and affection made
It seem a fairy hall:
A little taste, a little care,
Made humble things appear
As though they were translated there
From some superior sphere!

CHARLES SWAIN.

OUTSIDE the wall of the flower garden was a green lane—*so* green, and with *such* hedges on either side!—hedges which, in the spring, were rich in violets and primroses, such as never grew—or *I* fancied never grew—anywhere else; no, not even in our own grounds: but when I tell you that we lived in one of the most fertile parts of all-fertile Devonshire, you will be able to imagine, better than I could describe, the beauty of that little lane. Not far down this charming lane, and not two minutes' walk from our garden, was Aunt Mary's cottage. Now, I know you are dreading another description! Well, if I were to die for it, I *could not* help describing it.

Very small—very neat—furnished very simply, but in perfect taste. The room in which she generally sat had a large bow-window, overlooking the garden. Immediately before this window was a beautifully-kept lawn, planted here and there with flower-beds, standard rose-trees, and evergreens. At the end of the lawn was a small grove of trees, and, beyond that, an orchard. Under one of the apple-trees was a large rustic seat; and here my aunt and I had often held serious conversations. 'To spend the day, or even to take tea, at Aunt Mary's, was to me the greatest treat imaginable; but on this

particular day it was especially delightful. To think that *my* presence could give Aunt Mary pleasure! It *did* seem so strange! I had always thought that she asked me out of mere kindness—because she was so good, and because I was a poor, friendless, little creature, whom no one cared for. To think that she asked me because she *loved* me! Well, I supposed I should get used to the feeling in time; but it did seem strange.

Not to keep her waiting, I went there a little before the time of starting for church. She soon came down-stairs, and, taking my hand, we went out together. My mother always drove to hear a fashionable preacher some miles off; but my aunt attended the parish church, where a good and sincere man contented himself with simply preaching *the Gospel*.

Reginald Percival was an honest, sincere, upright man, and a clever and eloquent one, as well; but his sermons were always adapted to the comprehension of the simplest minds; because, while discussing the grand truths of Christianity, he contented himself with using the simple language of its Founder. While preaching, he thought of the *immortal souls* of his listeners—not of the effect which a display of his learning and eloquence would produce on their minds.

I had often before heard him preach, but had never been so impressed by any of his sermons as I was by this one. His text was, "God is love;" and he went on to shew the intense and undying love of God to man—His wonderful forbearance with them—His persevering efforts to draw them towards Himself. His discourse reminded me of my conversation with Aunt Mary a few days back; and I listened attentively to his words. He dwelt less upon the judgments than the *mercies* of God—His wonderful mercy—His intense love—passing aught that we mortals can imagine or understand. And then he quoted that marvellous passage, "Jesus wept." In those two words are contained a world of meaning; and the preacher dwelt upon them so forcibly, and was himself so earnest and moved, that my eyes filled with tears.

The sermon was ended, and we left the church and returned to the cottage, where I was soon busily engaged in poring over the leaves of a large illustrated bible, with strange and un-earthly pictures. I was wondering why all the people who lived long ago were so very ugly, and why their limbs were so out of joint that it must have been dreadfully painful to

move them ; when Mabel (Aunt Mary had but one servant—a pretty, bright-eyed girl of eighteen) brought in dinner, and the bible was laid aside.

After dinner, we went into the dear old orchard, and, seating ourselves under the great apple-tree, my aunt opened her bible, and began to read.

When I spent Sunday with her, she took me to church in the morning only ; contenting herself with reading to me in the afternoon, and explaining what she read.

I have known many well-meaning but injudicious persons take little children to church twice, or even thrice, a day, under the mistaken impression that they are thus imbuing them with an early taste for piety and devotion. Now these good people seem to forget that the beautiful services of the Church of England—good and excellent though they be—must be sadly wearisome to a little child, whose intellect is insufficient to comprehend them, and whose thoughts, despite all its efforts to restrain them, *will* wander to green fields and sunny skies, and trees, and flowers, and birds, and everything that has life. Watch a child—even the best trained and best disposed child in the world—during the reading of the service, and, after that, the sermon ; I have often done so, and have pitied the little creatures from my heart. The shifting attitude—the frequent though half-suppressed yawns—the timid, whispered question, “ Will it soon be over ? Is there *much* more now ? ” — the drooping eye-lid—the little, nodding head—and, finally, the deep slumber. And if it is so during *one* service only, what must it be when the infliction is repeated twice or thrice the same day ? How would these good mammas and aunts feel, if *they* were compelled to listen for a couple of hours to a discourse in Greek or Hebrew ? Yet that could hardly be more wearying to them than such long services—and, frequently, dry theological discourses—must be to a little child.

But I am forgetting that Aunt Mary has opened her Bible. The sun shone brightly, the birds sang, and a little brook, that flowed through the orchard, added its tiny, murmuring voice to Nature's melody. Oh ! I was happy, sitting there with my dear Aunt—so happy, that I wished it could always be Sunday, and I might never, never leave her !

She opened the book, and read to me the third chapter of James ; and when she came to the fifth verse, she read more slowly and impressively—

"Even so, the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth."

She paused; and then, turning to the fifteenth of Proverbs, continued—

"A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger. The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright; but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness. The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. A wholesome tongue is a tree of life; but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit. A fool despiseth his father's instruction; but he that regardeth reproof is prudent. . . . Correction is grievous unto him that forsaketh the way; and he that hateth reproof shall die. Hell and destruction are before the Lord: how much more then the hearts of the children of men? . . . The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility."

Then she read on from the next chapter, beginning at the third verse.

"Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord: though hand join in hand he shall not be unpunished. . . . A man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps. . . . Pride goeth before destruction; and a haughty spirit before a fall." And she closed the book.

"Nelly, dear, I have been thinking of what passed between us yesterday; and I have chosen those verses because I think that it will do you good to reflect on them. You have just heard, that 'the proud in heart are an abomination to the Lord,' and that 'pride goeth before destruction.' Now, I have often felt grieved at seeing a good deal of this proud and rebellious spirit in my little girl; and I love her so much, that it is a source of great pain to me, because I know, that if she give way to it, it will make her wretched, not only here, but hereafter."

I looked up quickly:

"Dear Auntie, if it pains you, I will cure myself of it—that I will!"

"And how will you do it, my child?"

"Oh! by being determined to crush it, and drive it away, and get rid of it."

"That is not the *only* way, dear; and I am afraid you will not succeed unless you try something besides."

"And what is that, Aunt?"

"Ask God to help you; you will never succeed without His aid. Pray to Him—beseech Him—day after day, and hour after hour, and whenever you feel tempted to be naughty and passionate. Never give up; for God never turns a deaf ear to an earnest, humble prayer. He 'resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.' Oh! Nelly, struggle—fight—against this proud, haughty spirit of yours. If I thought you would grow up with it, I should be miserable."

"But I *wont*, indeed I wont! I would do anything in the world to please you, and make you happy; and I *will* get rid of my pride."

"Nelly, dear, dont do it for the sake of pleasing *me*; do it because *God* commands it. Make *His* pleasure your first study, and then all will go well."

"Aunt, I am determined to be so good that no one *can* quarrel with me, even if they try to. If they scold me, I wont answer one word."

"My child, the mere *words* you utter are not the sin; it is the naughty, rebellious heart *within* you that offends God. I have just read, 'The tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth'; but the tongue is no more than the servant of our evil thoughts and passions: conquer *them* first of all. If you make your *heart* gentle to all the world, your *tongue* will be so, too. At first, you will find it very hard indeed to subdue your pride and ill-temper; and if you relied upon your *own* strength alone you could not do it at all; and I will tell you why. While you are in this world, you are in a state of probation, that is, of trial; and accordingly as you prove yourself the child of God, or the child of the devil, so will your lot be in the world to come. God is so anxious to receive you into *His* kingdom, that He is constantly putting good thoughts and resolutions into your heart; but the devil assails you by all sorts of evil suggestions; and when you feel them becoming too strong for you, if you do not pray most earnestly that your Heavenly Father would interpose His strength between you and your great enemy, you must fall! And every successful assault emboldens him to a fresh attack; and every time you fall you become less able to resist him. Oh! my child, try to bear this in mind. Whenever you feel inclined to be angry, think within yourself, 'The devil is tempting me; and if I give way, he will think that he has conquered me, and God

will turn away, and leave me helpless.' If you remember this, dear, you will pray for strength and help from One who is ever willing and able to afford it, and you will resist the tempter. Oh! Nelly, you cannot be too much on your guard against his wiles! Think what must be his daring, and how fearfully bent upon evil he must be, when he even assailed our blessed Lord Himself! *Pray* to be made strong enough to defeat him.'

"I will, Aunt; I never thought of all this before. When I feel inclined to be naughty, I shall fancy that I see the Devil trying to make me do wrong; but I shall fancy, too, that Jesus Christ is very near — quite close — only waiting for me to ask His aid."

"Yes, darling; and if you do this, you will find every succeeding temptation weaker than the last; until, at length, you will find it much easier to be good. Always remember, Nelly, that there are *two* worlds — this world, and the world to come. Endeavour to pass through this one as if you always saw the other before you, and were trying to get to it. Try never to lose sight of that other world; for to it you must go, and are even now hastening with such awful speed, that when, from your eternal abode, you look back upon your sojourn here, it will appear to you as less than a moment of time. Nelly, every night, when you are alone, ask yourself the question — do not shrink from it: — 'For which world have I this day been living?' If for this, pray to God to forgive you, and to send you His grace, that you may pass the next day in a manner more pleasing to Him. Will you do this, Nelly?"

I answered, very quietly (for I was deeply impressed by her words) —

"Yes, Aunt."

"And, my child — remember, that in the next world are two kingdoms — the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of the Evil One. The subjects of these two kingdoms are called 'Children of Light,' and 'Children of Darkness.' My darling — pray that you may be made 'a Child of Light, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven!'"

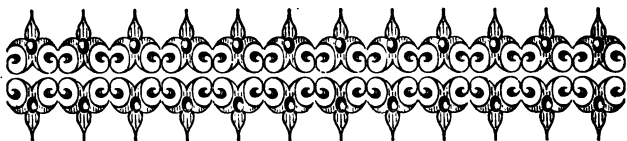
We were silent for some time. I was thinking; and she did not interrupt me. Soon after, we went in to tea. Before returning home, we walked in the grounds, and I took her to many of my favourite haunts — the rustic bridge amongst the

rest. And she admired them all, and asked me about my amusements and pursuits, and seemed to take so great an interest in them, that it was quite a pleasure to me to speak of them to her. And at last — yes, at last — I told her my *secret* — all about the bay ! And she promised not to tell any one; and she did not laugh at me, nor attempt to dissuade me from going there, but said that she thought it must be a very beautiful place, and that she should like to see it; therefore we agreed that she should go there the next half-holiday.

After this, we went into the house, where she sat a little while, talking with my mother; and then she left, and I went to bed, feeling very happy indeed.

As I passed my sister's room, I looked in, and kissed her gently without waking her. Then I went to my own room, and, before lying down, prayed that God would always be with me, to help me when I was too weak to help myself. And I prayed — Oh, how fervently ! — that He would bless my dear, dear Aunt Mary.





The lily's hue, the rose's dye,
The kindling lustre of an eye;
Who but owns their magic sway !
Who but knows they all decay !
The tender thrill, the pitying tear,
The generous purpose, nobly dear,
The gentle look, that rage disarms,
These are all immortal charms. — BURNS.

My life now went on very smoothly. I rose very early in the morning, went off to my retreat, and then returned to breakfast. After that came lessons — which (*entre nous*) I liked no better than before — until an hour before dinner. After an early dinner, I was allowed an hour's run in the garden, and then went to lessons again for two hours, by which time it was five o'clock. We then had tea, and I was afterwards at liberty to disport myself as I pleased, except that I had a few easy lessons to prepare for the next day; and as I did not like to break in upon my morning visit to my darling bay, I generally learnt them over night. Such was the daily routine.

Seldom did a day pass without my seeing Aunt Mary; my mother was very fond of her, and was in the habit of seeking her advice and sympathy on all occasions. She had often tried to persuade her to take up her abode in the house, but my aunt never would; I suppose she thought she could be more independent living alone. At the time of which I write, Aunt Mary was thirty years of age. I thought her beautiful — more beautiful than any one in the world; but I have since learnt that, strictly speaking, she had no pretensions to

beauty. She was tall, and slight, and had a graceful, bending figure. She had fine hair; and its light, waving bands were braided in a way that was exceedingly graceful and becoming. Her features were feminine and delicate, but not regular. Her soft, pensive, blue eyes had a tone of sadness that spoke of some sorrow long ago; and her mouth told the same sad tale. The ordinary expression of her face was one of extreme gentleness and repose; but when she smiled, it was never to be forgotten! — so full of soul, and intellect, and feeling! I have seen many faces more strikingly beautiful than Aunt Mary's; but I never met one to equal it in power of expression. That smile of hers was wonderful! Sometimes it was of inexpressible sadness — sometimes, of glee; but whatever feeling called it forth it was equally speaking.

I have said that she was thirty; but she did not look so old by five or six years. She was very graceful, and always dressed very well — even fashionably. There was something in her that was irresistibly fascinating; looking back now, I think that it must have been her intense *refinement*, which was apparent, not only in every word she uttered, but in all that surrounded her. Her air, her walk, her very *dress*, was refined; but it was her *mind* which gave the tone to all. I remember one night hearing a gentleman say of Aunt Mary —

“If I mistake not, she has once been insufferably proud and overbearing; but some great grief seems to have quelled her spirit.”

“She is a sweet creature!” ejaculated the person he addressed.

This gentleman called very often, and seemed to like Aunt Mary very much; and I wondered that she did not think him the nicest gentleman that had ever been there before (for *I* did; but then it was partly because he had spoken so well of my dear Aunt, and because I thought he preferred her to my mother): but she could not have done so, for if she was in the house when he called she would always leave it without seeing him; and this she did many times. At last he joined her one day, when she and I were together in the grounds, and he spoke very low; and just then my Aunt told me to run on before, as “Sir George was going to talk of something that I did not understand.” So I went on a little way, and presently my Aunt called me back to her, and Sir George was gone;

and then we continued our walk, but she did not talk so much as usual. After that, my nice Sir George never came again, and I was very sorry, for he used to give me many pretty presents; but I was angry with him for going away. My Aunt, however, did not seem at all sorry, and I could not imagine why she did not like such a very nice person; but then, to be sure, he never gave *her* presents.

Well, I have now given you a description of Aunt Mary, and I want you to like her very much; for she was the best and dearest friend I ever had, and I tremble to think what would have become of me without her gentle guidance. Her love for me was of a kind that never flagged nor faltered; her anxious, watchful care never slumbered. How she persevered! With what patience did she correct me! Not one fault did she allow to pass unnoticed; and, by little and little, she led me to love what was right, because virtue was so beautiful in her. What I should have done without her gentle ministration God only knows; perhaps it might have pleased Him to send me some other friend, as kind and good as she was; but *who* could have stood in *her* place?

Young, ardent, impetuous, with a heart naturally susceptible, and open to all impressions—with a spirit capable of being roused by injustice to the verge of frenzy, or softened by a kind word to tears of gratitude and love—I found myself an orphan, in the midst of cold and un pitying hearts. All my actions were misconstrued, and I was pronounced obstinate, deceitful, vindictive. I do not think I was, by nature, any of these, but I was intensely passionate; and when roused to opposition by a sense of injustice, I was a fiend rather than a child. Aunt Mary—God bless her!—was the first person who ever addressed to me a word of genuine kindness—of kindness that sprang from the heart. She saw the poor, desolate little child cast upon the wild and stormy ocean of life, her frail bark already half engulfed by the surging waves of trial and persecution. Hers was the watchful eye that warned of dangerous shoals and treacherous quicksands; hers the friendly hand which, through perils and dangers too many and fearful to be told, guided it at last to a haven of peace and security. She took the poor, helpless orphan to her bosom, and poured consolation into the little stricken heart, that had been well-nigh broken. And for that deed, Aunt Mary, may God in heaven for ever bless thee! Truly has it been said,

"Cast thy bread upon the waters, and thou shalt find it after many days." So it was with her; in her generous devotion to me, her untiring solicitude for my welfare, she found distraction from her own sad memories—the memories of bitter grief; and gradually the task, which she had at first undertaken as a duty, became to her an unspeakable source of consolation and happiness, and was the means of enabling her once more to look forward to life with something of the old hope and trust—that youthful armour with which most of us are clad before entering on the great world's battle, but which, alas! is so soon and so ruthlessly torn from us by the terrible foe, Disappointment—torn from us for aye; and, in place of which, is sometimes given us the sober garment of Resignation—that garment which, once doomed, is ours for ever.

But all this is a digression; so, to proceed with my tale. I have said that my life passed on very smoothly now. On the following Saturday afternoon Aunt Mary called for me, and we went out, hand in hand. I had dressed myself very carefully; for my Aunt was very particular with regard to neatness of dress, and I always studied to please her in everything. When we arrived at the lake, and were seated in the little boat, I felt quite proud to show my Aunt how well I could row; and she laughed so gaily at my efforts, and seemed so thoroughly to enjoy it, that my heart bounded with delight at the thought of *my* being able to give her pleasure.

"Well, Nelly, this really is delicious. You tiresome little monkey, never to have brought me here before! Don't row so fast, dear. I like being on the water so much. You selfish little thing to have kept all this a secret! Why, it is the greatest treat I have had for a long time; and I shall come very often after this, I can promise you, Miss Nelly."

"Dear Auntie, how kind you are!"

"But indeed, dear, it is a great pleasure to me. Now let us go to your retreat; I am longing to see it!" And we stepped on shore.

When we arrived at the crag, I had some inward misgivings as to how my Aunt would achieve the descent. I need not have feared; she made nothing of it, but was on terra firma almost as soon as myself. Dame Nature was that day in the best of tempers, and wore her sweetest smiles to greet Aunt Mary's first visit to my favourite haunt. The sun shone, the

waves sparkled and danced, the birds sang, the very insects hummed in a fever of delight and joy, as though their mere existence were a boon of unspeakable value.

Aunt Mary sat down on one of the shelving rocks, and, for a moment or two, was silent; she was drinking in the quiet beauty of the scene. I feared she did not admire my darling little nook.

"Aunt, dont you think it so pretty as you expected?" I asked anxiously.

"Oh! Nelly darling, it is a paradise! more lovely than I had any idea of." And I saw that the tranquil loveliness of the little spot had entered into her soul, and had made her silent.

Then she spoke of the wonderful goodness of the Being who, to make man happy, had created so beautiful a world; and sitting there, my hand clasped in hers, we talked quietly together for some time.

"Is n't it a pity, Auntie, that there are any large towns? How *can* people live in them?" (Barnstaple realised *my* idea of a 'large town,' for we lived in the North of Devon — not very far from that, to me, enormous city, and I had once or twice been driven there as a great treat.) "Poor things! how they must long to get away to the fresh air, and the grass, and flowers, and trees, and birds, and the grand, delicious sea! Oh! Aunt, I should *die* if I had to live in a large town, and I am sure *you* would!"

My Aunt smiled—a very grave, sad smile.

"Ah! Nelly, my happiest days were passed in a *very* large town—in London, which is, you know, one of the grandest towns in the world."

"Yes, Aunt," said I, recurring to my geography, and proud to show my knowledge, "'Middlesex—London—on the Thames.' But I can't believe it is larger than Barnstaple; and, as to the shops, why, there *could n't* be grander shops anywhere than at Barnstaple!"

"Well, darling, I hope you will always think so; it will be well for you." She was silent, and lost in thought, but soon continued: "I was born in London, and lived there all my life till a few years ago, and I was very happy there; but it was a kind of happiness that was not good for me, and which I humbly trust I may never know again: and I pray God that it may never be yours, dearest."

Oh! the intense, yearning, anxious look of the large blue eyes as they were bent upon me!

"Your own mamma lived there too, as well as your present mother; we had much happiness and sorrow in that great town."

Again she was silent. Her soul was with the "long ago," and I sat quietly beside her without interrupting her reverie.

"Your present mamma went there every year with your father; now she does not go, but she will again when you and your sister are older."

"Oh! Aunt, why?"

"Because, dear, she will then think it necessary for you to have society, and see the world, as other young people do."

"Oh! Aunt, do persuade mamma to let me stop here with you! I could n't bear to leave this darling place! I could n't bear it—indeed I could n't!" And, overcome at the thought, I burst into tears.

"Why, you foolish little thing!" said my Aunt, clasping me in her arms, and kissing away my tears; "you forget that you are only a little child, and that you will not go to town till you grow up, if then."

"Then, Aunt, I hope I shall be a long, long time in growing up."

My Aunt smiled: "When the time comes, dear, you will think very differently; but, if not, I will ask your mamma to leave you here: so don't trouble your little foolish head about it."

After that we talked of other things, and soon became very merry: such ringing peals of laughter had never before resounded in that spot—at least, not within *my* time. I had never, I thought, enjoyed anything so much, and had never had such laughs in my life. But, at last, my Aunt looked at her watch, and pronounced it time to decamp; so, with much regret, we took our way home, lingering a little while on the lake.

As we entered the parlour, they were just sitting down to tea; so my aunt said she would join us.

"How well you are looking, dear Mary," said my mother. "Such a colour! and your eyes, as bright as they were years ago—brighter than I hoped ever to see them again." And she

passed her hand caressingly over Aunt Mary's smooth waving hair.

"Well, you rude sister of mine, you certainly don't overwhelm me with compliments. Here have I just arrived, and graciously announced my intention of bestowing my society upon you this evening; and, lo! ever since I have entered your presence, you have been making the most strenuous efforts to persuade me that I am terribly *passée*. Never mind; I have found a little doctor who is going to cure all my ills: *this* is the magician who has conjured the bloom to my cheek, and the light of by-gone days into my eyes!" And she threw her arm round me, and drew me to her side.

My mother looked coldly, as was her wont.

"Comment peux tu souffrir cet enfant là? Moi, je suis toujours enchantée de m'en débarrasser!" was the chilling rejoinder.

My aunt answered very gravely—

"Tu as tort, ma sœur, et tu t'en conviendras, un de ces jours. Tu as *grand* tort!" (her eyes, despite herself, flashed indignantly). "C'est une petite, si charmante, si douce, si aimable!"

To which my mother replied:

"Eh bien! n'en parlons pas davantage! Je la déteste!"

This was said with an uncontrollable impetuosity which I had never before seen in my mother. My aunt sighed; and I could see the tears slowly filling her eyes. They either did not know, or had forgotten, that I understood enough French to be able to make out what they were saying. My mother's avowed dislike did not move me; I had been aware of it before: but my dear, dear aunt's generous defence!—how I loved her for it. She was silent for a minute or two, as if struggling for self-control. Soon the cheerful smile ("Aunt Mary's smile," I used to call it) returned, and she spoke in her own low, musical voice.

"And how is my little pet? Scold naughty mamma for talking to Aunt Mary, and making her forget to speak to little Edie!"

Edith ran to my aunt, and putting her little arms coaxingly round her neck, pleaded:—

"Take Edie on your lap!"

This was, of course, done immediately; and then the little thing, blushing furiously, (Edith was always blushing, and

it made her so enchanting), whispered, loud enough to be heard:—

“ You don't remember something —”

“ What, darling?”

“ Oh, *something!*” said Edie, blushing still worse than before.

“ Well, what is it, dear?”

“ Why—the doll!”

“ Oh, yes! I have not forgotten it; but it has not yet arrived, Edie: when it comes, Edie shall have it.”

“ But,” said Edith, poutingly, “ it is so long to wait! I am tired of waiting for it. Why can't it come *now?*” and Edith looked very far from pleased.

“ You must have patience, darling; it will come very soon—to-morrow, perhaps!”

“ But I want it to-day! I *won't* wait till to-morrow!”

The little lip quivered, and she began to cry with disappointment.

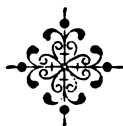
My little sister's face of trouble went to one's heart, and one felt quite miserable till she was consoled. We all crowded round her; and she was finally pacified by the assurance that, when the doll came, she should sit up half an hour later at night to nurse it.

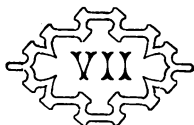
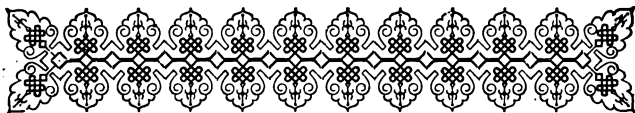
Thus did we all unite in spoiling the little darling, and in teaching her to make *self* the primary object of consideration. We taught her to expect everyone and everything to bend to her will; whatever she wanted, she had directly; and by this means she became sadly deficient in patience and self-denial. We *all* spoiled her—yes, all; even sensible, prudent Aunt Mary, forgot to correct this most fascinating child: for she *was* fascinating—that is the only word by which I can express the strange influence she exercised over all of us. If she was perverse and self-willed at one moment, she was such a little affectionate darling the next, that one had no time to dwell upon her faults and correct them; and thus the poor child became sadly spoilt. That sweet, plaintive, little voice, saying, as she would often do, after one of her naughty fits, “ I am very sorry,” was the most touching thing in the world; and then she would put up her little rose-bud of a mouth, and clasp her arms round one's neck;—and *who* could then be angry with her!

After tea we all strolled out together; Edith and I ran on before. My aunt and my mother walked slowly, and were

talking very earnestly. I thought Aunt Mary was giving my mother one of her sisterly lectures ; for when we had become tired of play, and joined them again, mamma was looking sad and thoughtful. Soon afterwards, I learned that *I* had been the subject of their conversation.

That was, altogether, a happy day for me ; and when, after saying " Good-night " to dear Aunt Mary, I went to bed, I could not sleep for a long time for thinking of it ; and when I slept, I dreamt it all over again.





“ The gentle mind is like the smooth stream, which reflects every object in its just proportion, and in its fairest colours. The violent spirit, like troubled waters, renders back the images of things distorted and broken, and communicates to them all that disordered motion which arises solely from its own agitation.”

EVERY night I did as Aunt Mary told me, and asked myself the question, “ For which world have I been living to-day?” and every morning I prayed for grace and strength to bear me through the trials of the coming day: and, as she had foretold, I felt every succeeding temptation grow weaker than the last, and began to hope that, in time, I might altogether cease to give way to temper. The servants and the governess noticed the wonderful change, and attributed it to the right cause—Aunt Mary’s influence; and I felt proud and happy to hear *her* praised as the author of my amendment. Mrs. Goodrich, the head-nurse, was much attached to my mother; but her affection for Edith amounted almost to worship. She was Edith’s *slave*; and the child, warmly as she returned her affection, tyrannised over her to an extent that was incredible. I one day heard Mrs. Goodrich speaking of me to the under-nurse as follows:—

“ I can’t think what’s come over Miss Eleanor; she used to be such a naughty child—so obstinate and sulky, that one could do nothing with her;—and now she’s always well-spoken and good-tempered. ‘ Yes, if you please, Mrs. Goodrich’—‘ No, thank you, Mrs. Goodrich,’ instead of ‘ Yes’—‘ No,’ or, sometimes, ‘ No, you fool!’ Then, she used to be such an untidy child, that she never could be made to do one credit; but now, she always sits down to meals with her hair brushed, and her face and hands washed, and her dress not in

tatters as it used to be. I think it's her aunt has done it all; she's a sweet lady, and Miss Eleanor's very fond of her; and no wonder either, for I do believe Miss Dudley loves her better than that little angel, Edith! That's the only thing I don't like Miss Dudley for; but she's very fond of *my* darling, too."

As I became more gentle and amiable, everyone grew kinder towards me; and I learned to love them, and to take a pleasure in doing them little services. My dear aunt told me how happy she was made by this improvement in me, and how she hoped it would continue; but she specially warned me to be *always* on my guard—*never* to feel safe from my besetting sin—and, above all, never to trust to my *own* strength to resist temptation.

And the summer was passing on very happily for me; for I saw my dear aunt every day, and she talked to me so kindly and affectionately, and was so anxious about me, that I must have been incorrigible if I had erred in spite of her watchful care.

One day, at the end of July, I had been roaming about alone till I was overcome with fatigue and heat, and longed to lie down somewhere in the shade; so, lifting the curtains of a tent which had been put up in the ornamental grounds, I crept in, and lying down, was soon fast asleep.

Before long, the sound of voices fell upon my ear—at first mingling with dreams, and then gradually attracting my attention, till I shook off my remaining drowsiness, and sat up to listen.

My aunt and mamma were sitting on a rustic bench, under a large tree that grew outside; there was a slight rent in one of the curtains, and, looking through, I could see their faces. It was my aunt who was speaking.

"It *is* wrong, Gertrude, and you know it! You make no effort to conquer the feeling; on the contrary, you cherish and foster it. What has that poor, helpless child done, that you should treat her with this never-varying, systematic coldness? Will you *never* forget? Are there, then, some wrongs which not even the *grave* can cancel?"

"Yes!" and the splendid eyes absolutely *blazed*, and the small hands were clenched, and the foot beat rapidly on the ground; "Yes—there are *some* wrongs that neither time nor *eternity* can efface—some wrongs, the memory of which sears the brain, and scorches the heart, and rankles and fosters to

the very core of one's being! And such a wrong did I receive from *her*; and though I were to live for thousands of ages, it would still dwell in my memory, and my hatred for her accursed offspring would increase with each generation!"

She looked a fiend, rather than a woman! I trembled; for I was in her power. Aunt Mary buried her face in her hands, and wept bitterly.

"Oh Gertrude! is there then *no* hope for this poor child? If I were to die, what would become of her?"

My mother was softened in an instant.

"Dear Mary! my dearest sister! my kind, patient friend! forgive me! For your sake, and also from a sense of duty to him who is no more, I have always endeavoured to treat the child *justly*; more I cannot do—nor can you imagine the intense effort it costs me to do even thus much. Did she resemble *him*, I might forget the past; but how can I do so, when she every day becomes more like her hated mother! She is growing *so* like her, that, when she enters my presence unexpectedly, I almost forget that the grave has closed over her for years—and I fancy that my detested rival stands before me!"

My aunt rose; there was an indignant flash in her eye, that frightened me more than all my mother's violence. She spoke:—

"If you ever again *dare* to utter such words in connection with my dear, dear Eleanor, or her sweet child——"

Her voice faltered. She stopped. Her manner changed.

"It is *my* turn to ask forgiveness—I have forgotten myself! Gertrude, I shall say no more; but, oh! for my brother's sake, be merciful to his child!"

"For *his* sake?—and is that *all*, Mary? Is it for the sake of no *other* that you take so deep an interest in this orphan?"

Her words were spoken with a meaning emphasis that smote like a dagger to the heart of her to whom they were addressed.

"Unkind! Ungenerous!"

She could say no more; and, as she turned away, I saw her eyes fill with tears which she was too proud to shew.

This speech of my mother's was a mystery to me; but the look of intense suffering—the anguish of wounded pride—on my dear Aunt Mary's face, I shall not easily forget. She was turning away, when my mother caught her hands, and, in wild and incoherent words, passionately besought her to forget her unkind speech.

To forget! We may *forgive*; but, to *forget*?

The memory is a stubborn servant; it will neither be coaxed nor driven into surrendering its rights. How easy is it, in a moment of irritation, to utter a few little words, which sink so deeply into the heart that no time can remove them! They lie there—the seeds of future thoughts and feelings; and in due time they spring up, and bear leaves, and blossom, and fruit. In a soil untilled by the Divine Husbandman, and therefore left a prey to those weeds and brambles—unchecked passions—this fruit often ripens into deeds of vengeance; but in a gentle and subdued heart (like my Aunt Mary's) its fruit is very bitter—the bitter fruit of tears, and wounded pride, and, sometimes, a broken spirit.

Dear, good Aunt Mary! she was now weeping convulsively, despite all my mother's efforts to restrain her.

At last she said, in broken, half-stifled accents:—

"I am not angry, Gertrude; but I *must* leave you—I *must* be alone. I shall soon be calm. Let me go now."

And she tried to rise. My mother detained her.

"Don't leave me, Mary! Oh, if you knew how I *hate* myself for having pained you! Whom have I left to love but you and my child? What should I be without your affection, my friend, my sister, my guide? Oh, Mary, don't weep so bitterly!"

And she laid her head on my aunt's shoulder, in a paroxysm of grief and remorse.

My mother was before me in quite a new character. I had never imagined it possible that her proud spirit could be moved to tears, or stoop to *entreat* any living creature. Suddenly, a bright smile flashed across her face.

"Mary, to pacify you I will do what, an hour ago, I would not have entertained the thought of doing. I will try—mind, I only say, *try*—to like that child. Come, you had better close with my offer while I am in the mood; or, in five minutes —"

She was interrupted by her listener, who, forgetting her own sorrow, replied:—

"You were always a wilful, spoilt child, Gertrude; but a dear, generous, noble creature, too! I must never expect you to act like a rational or accountable being!"

She always seemed to think of my mother as if she had never grown up. The latter was, however, highly gratified.

"Well, then," she said, "is it a compact?"

"Yes, dearest Gertrude," replied my aunt, as she fondly smoothed down the rich dark hair on my mother's pure brow, and caressed the little hands clasped so coaxingly round her arm.

"But really, my darling Gertrude, you should not allow yourself to—"

She was interrupted by my mother, who, with a wilful childish manner there was no resisting, exclaimed:—

"Now—don't be treating me like a baby! You are only four years my senior, though I *am* such a fool! at least, so *you* think me!"

My aunt smiled:—"You will *always* be a baby—I have no hope of you!"

My mother continued, more gravely:—"Mary, my conscience often reproaches me most bitterly for my conduct to the child; and yet, do what I will, I *cannot* help it. I *know* that I am unjust to her; she is a good, obedient child, quiet and docile, and anxious to avoid giving offence; but she is so like—like the *first* Eleanor, that I cannot help hating her. Yet no one can say that I have been a *harsh* step-mother; cold and unloving I may have been—but not strict; and if you knew what an effort it has cost me to treat her with even thus much of indulgence—to even tolerate her presence—" She checked herself. "There, Mary, dearest, don't be afraid; I am not going to offend you again; and I will keep my promise, and *try* to like the child; but I am very doubtful of my own powers—"

"Ah, Gertrude! seek a strength greater than your own; struggle earnestly for it; if you ask, it will be given you!"

"Mary, I am not religious; I never was; I fear I never shall be!"

"Oh, Gertrude! I should be very sorry to think so!"

They now rose, and walked towards the house. As soon as they were out of sight, I ran off to the wood, and there, seated on the mossy sward, with the dense foliage over head, I thought—and thought.

It was all a mystery to me. What could have been this great wrong which my mother found it so hard to forgive? Some wrong, it seemed, inflicted upon her by my own dear, dear mamma. Whatever it might be, I felt sure that *my* mamma was not to blame—that was certain. Either my

step-mother was very unjust to her, or it was some great mistake. I felt dreadfully grieved to think that my step-mother hated my dear, gentle mamma, who looked—in her picture—as if she could never have been unkind to any one; and the thought that she had perhaps treated my beloved mother as she did me, and had made her, too, unhappy, pained me exceedingly. I could not make it all out; so I resolved to ask my aunt about it. Then, there was evidently some mystery connected with my aunt's love for me. I thought over the words which had so painfully moved her:—"Is it for the sake of no *other* that you take so deep an interest in this orphan?" This I could not make out. If my dear mamma was that "*other*" person, why should my aunt have seemed so hurt and offended? It was all full of mystery, and I would not for worlds have applied to my aunt for an explanation of the latter part of it; but, so far as concerned my mamma, I was determined to know.

And then I went on thinking about Aunt Mary's goodness to me, and wondering how she could take such an interest in a child so stupid and ugly.—Here, again, occurred a break in my meditations. Ugly? Why, even my step-mother admitted that I was growing every day more like my dear mamma! Could I then be ugly? But here I remembered that our nurse's daughter was considered very like her mother: now, the daughter was very good-looking, but the nurse was brown, and rather wrinkled, and not at all handsome: so I thought I would ask Aunt Mary about that, too. And, through it all, I felt a sort of anger, mingled with a strange kind of pity, for my mother; and I felt that I would rather not see her for some time, as I feared I might be tempted to be naughty.

But then I remembered all that my kind adviser had told me, and I had a long struggle with myself. At last, thinking that it must be getting late, I went home.

It was later than I fancied, and they had nearly finished tea; so I expected a few of my mother's icy, dignified words. On the contrary, she smiled gently, and, noticing my trepidation, said, very kindly—

"Dont be frightened, Nelly; you are rather late; but never mind, you will be in better time to-morrow; and if not, it is no great matter, for the fresh air of the garden is good for you. You have been a good child lately—a *very* good child, and I have been pleased with you."

Had the earth opened at my feet I could not have been more astonished. I resolved never again to be late for tea. Looking up hastily, I caught the constrained smile on my mother's face, and saw my aunt bestow on her one of grateful affection, which no kindness to herself would have won from her—a smile which must have requited my mother for the painful effort she had made. She had called me “Nelly.” She had spoken to me as if I were a *child*, and she had spoken kindly. And what all her coldness had failed to do, was effected by those few simple words. I looked up bewildered. I longed to throw my arms round her neck, and beg her to love me and to treat me as I were her own child; but I did not: remembering a former scene, I sat still, trying to conquer my feelings. All would not do: I clasped my hands supplicatingly, and articulated, in broken accents—“Oh! thank you—God bless you, mamma!” and then burst into tears.

Soon, however, I mastered this outbreak, and sat quietly finishing my tea, and feeling—oh! how happy!

After tea I went out alone, though they asked me to accompany them. I thought how good it was of my poor mamma to try to treat me kindly while she disliked me, and while it must be so painful to her. I felt very grateful to her, but very much pained on her account. I thought how dreadful it would be to be always making this effort to be kind to me while she hated me all the time; and I determined that she should not have to do so.

I returned to the house, and found that my aunt had gone home, and my little sister was in bed. My mother was alone.

I sat down in a window-seat, my heart beating, my courage ebbing away. At last, I rose. I approached my mother, and stood before her.

“Mamma, I want to speak to you.”

“Speak then, Nelly; dont be afraid.”

“Mamma, you have been very kind to me to day, and I feel—indeed I do—very grateful for it: but I know that you dont love me—that you never will. And I know that it is very hard for you to speak kindly, because you dont like me. And so, mamma, I want you to treat me just as you did before, because I can't bear to give you pain. And I will try always to be a good child, and not to give you trouble; but, please—good, kind mamma—dont do what pains you for the sake

of making me happy. I don't expect it—indeed I don't. Good night, dear mamma."

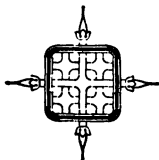
By this time I had almost lost my self-control; so, remembering her horror of a "scene," I quickly left the room.

I stood before the picture of my young, beautiful, lost mother, and prayed her, if she could see me, to bless and love me; and I prayed, that if the spirits of men are permitted to hover round the scenes of their earthly joys and sorrows, hers might be near me, to comfort, and console, and guide me.

Before closing my eyes, I asked myself the question—"Have I to-day lived most for this world or for the next?"

The moon shed her calm, pure light into the little room; the stars glimmered and twinkled in the deep blue of the firmament. Thinking of them, of the worlds that lay beyond them, and of the mighty God who made them all, I fell asleep. After some time I had a sort of consciousness that I was not alone, but felt too drowsy to wake. With a great effort, I partially roused myself, and then fancied that some one was bending over me; but clouds had then covered the face of the moon, and the room was dark. I moved, and immediately fancied I heard a slight sound, as of some one stealthily leaving the room. I felt rather frightened, but hearing nothing more, thought it must have been my fancy; and yet how distinctly sounded the rustle of a silken dress as it seemed to sweep the floor. It reminded me of my mother: but would *she* come to watch me in my sleep? Oh! no; it was all my fancy.

My face was wet with tears, as if I had been crying in my sleep; and, as I had been dreaming about the events of the day, I supposed that I had been weeping unconsciously.





SEE the leaves around us falling,
Dry and wither'd, to the ground,
Thus to thoughtless mortals calling
With a sad and solemn sound:
'Sons of Adam — once in Eden —
Where, like us, he blighted fell —
Hear the lesson we are reading;
Mark the awful truth we tell!

'Ye, on length of days presuming,
Who the paths of pleasure tread,
View us — late in beauty blooming —
Number'd now among the dead!
On the tree of life eternal
Oh! let all our hopes be laid:
This alone, for ever vernal,
Bears a leaf that shall not fade.'

HYMN.

TIME wore on very pleasantly at Rocklands. The summer was over, and autumn had come — the brown, sober autumn, with its mellowed hues, and dropping leaves, and mournful sighing winds. Autumn! for me it has ever a melancholy association, reminding me, as it does, of the passing away of the bright joyous summer, and the coming of dreary winter. Delicious summer! With its bright sun, and sky, and flowers — its gentle perfumed breezes — it is gone! and so, farewell to all its delights. Autumn, too, has its pleasures; but to me there is something melancholy in the season. Its fading hues, and perishing leaves and flowers, and mournful winds, remind me of the decay of life — the approach of death. I never feel *very* happy in the autumn, at least, not as I do in spring and summer.

This autumn brought trouble to me. Aunt Mary, who was

not very strong, was ordered to Brighton for change of air; and when I was told that she must go, I felt a sense of utter desolation steal over me.

Aunt Mary to go—perhaps for months! Aunt Mary, from whom I could not bear to be absent for two days together! It is true, my mother, ever since that eventful conversation, had been very kind, though not *affectionate*; but *who* could replace my dear, dear Auntie? I was nearly wild with grief. I could not reconcile myself to this parting. I went moping about the house, taking no interest in anything. Every night I cried myself to sleep; every morning I woke with a heavy consciousness of sorrow to come. When I was with my aunt I would sit by her side, and clasp her hand firmly in both of mine, as if each moment I fancied she would be taken from me. Now and then heavy tears would roll slowly down my cheeks, and I would turn away to hide them from my dear aunt; for I could not bear to vex her.

It was Sunday, and she was to leave on the following Tuesday. I was, as usual, spending the day with her. We sat under the large apple-tree. I was clinging to her, and sobbing in wild and unrestrained grief at the thought of her departure, and of the next Sunday, and the next, and many more without her. I could not nerve myself to bear it patiently.

She waited till my grief was a little calmed, and then spoke. The low, clear tones of her sweet voice seem, even now, to be ringing in my ears. I fancy I can see the dear old orchard, not decked, as it had been, in the glorious panoply of summer, but with its bright hues sobered by the dark tints of autumn. The ground was strewn with dead leaves, and many were falling around us. The air was still warm, but now and then a sudden chilly breeze warned that the genial summer had passed away. The wind was sighing mournfully, and all nature seemed to sympathise with my grief. The autumn, with its saddening feelings and associations, seemed more in harmony with my thoughts than a gayer season would have been. My aunt spoke:—

“My darling child, it is, I know, very hard to bear, and this is the first time you have known the bitter grief of parting from one you love; but there are some partings far more bitter; and if you cannot bear this little separation from me, how would you be able to submit if it pleased God to take me from you altogether?”

I started. I had often noticed, that when my aunt was in the least fatigued she looked so pale and delicate, that she seemed too fragile for earth. I had often thought that she looked more like a spirit, with her sweet blue eyes, and the delicate blush of her cheek, and her thin, transparent hand; but it had never struck me that these were symptoms of delicate health. Now, however, something in my aunt's tone and manner told me so at once; and a chill of horror and dread unspeakable fell crushing upon my heart. I looked in her face, and read, in her sad, compassionate smile, that I was not mistaken.

"Nelly, my sweet, sweet child, this parting will be brief. I shall be away for only six weeks or two months; and that is not long."

Long? No; it now seemed to me but a moment in comparison with that *other* parting, which it was horror even to think of.

"Oh! Auntie—dear, kind, darling Auntie—I love you so much! This going away seems nothing now. But—but—oh! Auntie, Auntie, you won't die before Nelly, your own Nelly, whom you love so much! Oh! Auntie, *say* you did n't mean *that*."

"My own darling, we are all in the hand of God, and none can say how long may be their span of existence. You may die first."

"Ah! if I thought so, dear Auntie, I should feel so happy."

"Nelly, dear, your papa died in a decline, and the doctors think it possible I may do so too; yet I *may* live for many years, and I hope I shall, to be a friend to my little Nelly. God's will be done! Whatever He ordains is infinitely best. For He can see into the thick darkness of coming events; but *we* are blind, and can only grope feebly, and often lose our way. If *He* guide us, all will go well."

"Auntie, I suppose the doctors have ordered change of air to prevent your getting ill?"

"Yes, dear; to set me up, and make me strong for the winter."

"But, Aunt, dear, we have the sea so near us. Why go all the way to Brighton?"

"Because, darling, they say it will be a greater change, that I want bracing, and that the air of Brighton is very good for it."

"Then, Aunt, I am very glad you are going, and I won't cry any more about it. I will think to myself, 'For every week that Aunt Mary is away, perhaps she will gain a year of health:' and then I shall feel glad."

"And, Nelly, dear, while I am away you must remember all I have told you. I am afraid, dear, you will not find it so easy to keep all your good resolutions when Aunt Mary is not by to scold. You would find it just as easy, if your efforts were directed towards pleasing One who *never* leaves you. I wish my Nelly thought more of her heavenly than of her earthly friend; then, whoever might go away, she would not be alone, and would *always* find it easy to be good. I am afraid that my child's efforts to conquer her impetuous temper have been prompted more by love for Aunt Mary than for God. Is it not so?"

"Yes, Auntie."

"I can't scold you, darling; but oh! how I wish that you would make His will your first thought, and to please Him your first endeavour; then you would always be strong — with a strength not your own — and it would make no difference whether I left you or not. As it is, dearest Nelly, I fear greatly that you will not go on so smoothly without your Auntie."

"Oh! but I *will*, dear Aunt Mary! I will try. I will *never* give way! I will always think, when I feel tempted, that Satan is trying to make me sin; and if I feel weak, I will pray for more strength. Oh, Auntie, you shall hear that I have been *so* good!"

She kissed me warmly.

"My darling! you are always good with me! If I loved you less, I should feel less anxious about your welfare; and I should, therefore, very likely, spoil you more than I do. I hope, dear, you will be *very* gentle, and forbearing, and submissive; and if you ever fancy yourself treated unjustly, or with a want of kindness, remember that it is not for a little girl to question the conduct of her superiors in age and wisdom. They may have motives for their conduct, of which she is ignorant; they may *feel* kindly, when, in manner, they appear most estranged; or they may be tried by numberless crosses and afflictions, which my little girl is too young to understand. So, Nelly, be patient and gentle with all; and if no higher motive impel you, oh! do it for Aunt Mary's sake!"

"There, Auntie! now I am sure to be good! For *your* sake! Dear, dear Aunt Mary! there is nothing in the world I would not do for your sake!"

And my eyes filled with tears of affection and gratitude, as I laid my head on her shoulder, and clasped my arms round her neck.

"Don't be *too* sure, Nelly darling — I am never sure that a day will pass without my doing something to make me feel that I have lived more for this world than the next; so don't be *too* sure, my child. I hope, Nelly, that you will, above all, be very kind and gentle with your little sister; she is a sweet little creature, but, now and then, rather wilful. You must bear with her, and make her love you; and then, partly from her wish to please you, partly from seeing how good you are, she will learn to check her little wayward humours."

I thought of Aunt Mary's similar influence over me.

"Will you promise to do this for my sake, Nelly?"

"Yes, Auntie; and when you come back you shall hear how patient I have been, and you will know that it was because you asked me. It's all I can do to shew you how much I love you."

"Ah! Nelly, darling — I wish you had a *higher* motive; but I cannot find in my heart to scold you for loving me."

"Do you know, Aunt, I don't think I shall be *much* tempted to be naughty. Mamma is so kind to me, — though I know she doesn't love me, — that I would do anything to please her; and I wouldn't pain her by being angry with little darling Edith."

I dared not tell my aunt of the conversation that I had overheard between her and my mother, for I knew she would blame me for not leaving the tent at once; but as I was very anxious to know the reason of my mother's dislike to my poor dear mamma, I broke into the subject with —

"Auntie, why does mamma dislike me? Do all step-mothers hate the children who are not their very, very own?"

My aunt was startled. She was silent for a moment, and then replied —

"Far from it; I have known many step-mothers kinder to their adopted children than their own parents would have been. You seem to have taken it into your little foolish head, that your mamma does not like you. Now, I do not see that you have reason to complain; your mamma treats you with

much indulgence, and I have often seen her pass over faults of yours which required instant correction."

"Yes, Aunt; and that is one of the things that pain me. She takes no interest in me, or she would try to cure me of my faults — as you do. She is not unkind; but she is so *cold* to me!"

"My dear Nelly, you do not understand your mamma. She has had great troubles; and they have had an influence over her manners. When she appears distant and reserved, she is often thinking of the past; and her heart is far away."

I knew this well enough, and interpreted her words in a way she little imagined.

"Auntie, did she know my dear mamma? And did she like her?"

My aunt started.

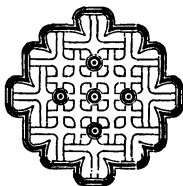
"I think, Nelly, you must have been listening to the foolish talk of servants. What can have made you ask all these questions? Yes; she knew your mamma; they were great friends."

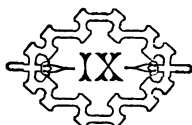
"Always, Aunt?"

Again she paused and hesitated.

"My dear Nelly, I cannot see that it concerns you to have these questions answered. I do not like curiosity in little girls; so don't ask any more questions. Your mamma and your second mother were friends for many years; they were brought up together, and were very fond of each other; they were my friends too, and I loved them both as sisters."

And now we went in to tea, and afterwards took our stroll in the grounds, going over all our customary haunts, with a sad feeling that many things might be changed ere we should together visit them again.





Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not to
thine own understanding

In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy
paths.

PROVERBS iii. 5, 6.

TUESDAY came; and my dear aunt left. I had received her last kiss, and "goodbye," and had watched the chaise which conveyed her away — not till it was out of sight — but till my blinding tears prevented my seeing it any longer. And then I threw myself down on the grass and cried till I could cry no more; and after that, I returned, with a heavy heart, to the house, where I knew that I should be utterly desolate for the next two months.

My mother, seeing my grief, excused my lessons for that day, and told me that I might play in the garden with Edith. This was more congenial to my feelings than anything else, not only on account of my great affection for my little sister, but because my aunt had so especially charged me to be kind to her. So I talked to Edith about Aunt Mary. At first, I found her a rather unsympathetic listener, till I suggested that perhaps my aunt might bring Edith a doll, or something, from Brighton; and then little Edie was all anxiety for her return. After that we got on very well, and time passed quickly until tea-time, after which we went out with my mother, who was unusually kind to me. I suspected my aunt had given her a parting lecture.

I went to bed, and fell asleep thinking of Aunt Mary, praying God to bless her, and full of good resolutions for the morrow.

And those resolutions I kept all that day, and the next, and many more; but at length my mother, whose kindness of

manner for a little while had led me to hope that she was really overcoming her dislike to me, relapsed, by little and by little, into her former coldness and reserve. I struggled with all my might (and yet, perhaps not *all*) against my angry feelings; then, yielding to those feelings, against the expression of them. I was rankling under a bitter sense of injustice. Aunt Mary's gentle influence was missed by more than one in that house. I had heard from her twice since her departure, and her letters were filled with earnest entreaties that I would persevere in what was right; and after urging me to do my duty because *God* commanded it, she added, "And remember, darling, you promised, for *my* sake, to make every effort to subdue your temper;—and in what other way can you prove that you love me?" I felt strong and resolute for some days after reading her letters; but the frequent injustice to which I was subject fretted and galled me insupportably. Only, I was gentle and forbearing with little Edith; do what she might, I was patient with *her*; but with others, even if I restrained my words, my manner was far from conciliatory. I became morose and gloomy, hardly ever addressed a word to any one, and was never in the house, except for meals, or lessons. Oh! how I prayed for Aunt Mary to come back! How I longed for a word of affection from *some one*! How I yearned for the never-failing support and sympathy I used to draw from her! The time of her return was fast approaching. I was *determined* to be good, in order to deserve her praise for my self-denial. I was doomed to fall; for I relied too much on my own strength, and aimed at pleasing an earthly, instead of a heavenly friend.

It was within a short time of Aunt Mary's return — a bright, clear afternoon in October. For the last two days, I had had a new object of interest. A poor little bird had been injured by the cat, and I was nursing it in hope of restoring it to health. Amidst the coldness and neglect of all around me, it was something to love and cherish—something to take me out of myself. I had risen early that morning, in order to feed it; and, all day, except when at my lessons, the little bird was in my hands, and already began to be tame, seeming to know, and be grateful to, its benefactress. This addition to my society was all the more welcome, because Edith had been cross and pettish for the last day or two, and would not play;

and I had need of all my self-control to refrain from answering her sharply.

Well, this evening, I came in to tea, carrying my wounded pet carefully in its little basket. As soon as Edith saw it, she uttered a fretful whine, and demanded possession. Trembling for my pet, I mildly remonstrated—

"No, Edith darling, not that!—anything else of mine that you like—but not the poor, little bird! because he has hurt his wing, and to touch it gives him pain. When he is well you shall have him in your lap, all to yourself, as long as you like."

But Edith was not satisfied; the little face became piteous, and the eyes were raised entreatingly to her mamma's.

"Eleanor, how can you be so unkind to your sister! Poor little thing! She is far from well! but you neither see it, nor, if you did, would you care! I have been nursing her all day; she is very feverish, and she shall not be thwarted so unreasonably! Give me the basket; she shall not touch the bird, but she *shall* look at it!"

I obeyed, tremblingly apprehensive of what was to follow; for I saw Edith's hands twitching nervously, and her eyes dilating.

My fears were but too well founded; no sooner was the basket within her reach, than she seized the bird with both hands. I saw a flutter—a struggle;—she, fearing it would escape, tightened her grasp. I sprang forward, and unclasped the little fingers so firmly closed round the throat of my pet—too late, alas!—it gave one convulsive struggle, and fell over on its back—dead!

For an instant, I was paralyzed with horror and grief; then, forgetting all Aunt Mary's precepts, forgetting my love for my little sister,—oblivious of all, save the terrible fate of my murdered darling, I sprang furiously upon the author of the mischief, shook her, and inflicted on her a heavy blow. I heard my sister's cry of pain and terror, and, the next moment, felt myself seized and dashed from her. My mother stood before me as I had once seen her—as she appeared when she spoke of my dead parent! Her whole frame trembled with rage. I could see that she longed to *kill* me, and that she had all the will to tear me limb from limb, as if she were a wild and furious tigress, and I, her prey! *My* anger vanished before such terrible wrath.

She spoke. Her words came forth in hoarse and broken accents.

"Savage! — whom, in spite of what I know of your deadly nature, I have *tried* to tame —, quit my presence, before I do that which may make you a cripple for life! Your sight is hateful to me! You taint the very air! I cannot breathe it with you!"

More she might have said; but, horror-stricken at the fearful workings of her countenance, even more than at her words, I fled, in a paroxysm of terror and remorse, and, falling on the ground before my mother's picture, passed the night in an agony of grief.

The next morning I stole down early, and, finding my poor favourite, carried it tenderly to a quiet spot in the garden; then, wrapping it carefully in my doll's best shawl, and depositing it in my pretty painted domino box, I gave it one last kiss, and buried it.

This mournful ceremony so far renewed my grief for the loss of my bird, that my remorseful feelings towards my little sister yielded to those of indignation; and, drying my tears, I sulkily entered the breakfast room. I found no one there; the breakfast cloth was not spread, though it was past the usual hour; and the room was exactly as it had been the night before.

Encountering a servant, I asked why breakfast was not ready; but he only brushed quickly past me, saying, "I can't stop to speak to you, Miss Eleanor, for I am going to B—— for the doctor. John has been sent on to S—— for Dr. Blanchard, but he may be from home;" and he was gone.

The doctor? Why—who was ill? I ran up-stairs to the nursery, and found no one—not even the old nurse. A terrible suspicion flashed across me. Edith had, for the last two days, complained of head-ache; she had been feverish, and had a sore throat. They thought she had taken cold, and therefore kept her in the house.

Could she be worse?

A sudden impulse led me to her room. The door was bolted within; but, in answer to my knock, the nurse opened it.

"Go away, Miss Eleanor. Your sister is very ill, and you must not disturb her. Go away."

"Oh, nurse! dear, good nurse! let me see my darling little sister! for one moment—only one moment! Oh, do, do!"

"No, miss; you must not come in here. I think your sister has the fever; and you will catch it, if you come in."

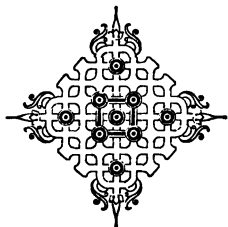
"I don't mind—I don't care for catching it—not even if I die of it! Only let me see dear, darling little Edith!"

"No, Miss Nelly, you must not; nor must you stand here talking with me—you may take it from me. Poor Miss Nelly! You are a good child to love your sister, but it is best to keep away from her now; when she is better you shall see her. I mustn't stay away from her any longer. Go, my dear!"

And she gently pushed me out, and again bolted the door; but not before I had caught a glimpse of my mother, kneeling beside her darling's sick bed, with her features sharpened into an expression of anxiety most painful to behold. She had evidently not slept that night; her eyes were red with weeping. One hand of the little sufferer was clasped in both of hers with an intense clasp, as if she felt that she could thus ward off the fell stroke of the great sunderer of human ties.

Ah! could she have foreseen, in that moment of agony—could she have looked forward a few short years—, would she have offered up that agonized petition:—"Oh, my God! not *this* stroke! Any other—*any* other—and I will submit! Oh, spare her life! it is all I ask"?

Ah! little Edith—sweet little sister! Would that thou hadst died then, in thy youth, and happiness, and innocence!





"Has it never seemed to us, when surrounded by sorrows, that they may be sent to us only for our instruction — as we darken the cages of birds when we wish to teach them to sing?"—JEAN PAUL.

I HAVE led a strange and troubled life; I have seen much sorrow — yes, sorrow that would have broken the hearts of some, and driven others mad; but never in my maturer years have I suffered as I did then. My cup of bitterness was full to the brim, and overflowing. In my later trials, *self-reproach* was not added to my grief; but here I laboured under a weight of remorse — unavailing remorse: for, if my little darling sister died, how could I ever forget my conduct of the foregoing night?

The gentle, timid baby — so timid that the least harsh word made the blood mount to her cheeks and forehead, and the little lip quiver, and the eyes fill with tears!

How I loved her! How I hated myself!

I knelt down outside her door, and prayed — as I had never prayed for myself — that God would spare her.

(Oh! blind! blind! I little knew for *what* I prayed!)

I waited there — they could not drive me away — till the doctor came; and, as he left the room, I caught his hand, imploring him to tell me what ailed my sister.

"My little girl, your sister has a fever; and you must not stay so near her room, or you may have it too."

"Oh, sir, is she *very* ill? Will she die?"

"I hope not, my dear; but I shall come again to-night."

Then, turning to the nurse, he said:—

"This child must not stay here. In her present excited state, she is, more than ever, liable to infection."

"Oh, sir," said poor Mrs. Goodrich, with clasped hands and

streaming eyes, "tell me! tell me! I *ought* to know! is the child in danger?"

The doctor looked grave, and paused.

"Well, nurse, the child *is* in danger; and much will depend upon your controlling your feelings sufficiently to be able to observe all the directions I shall give, and on your keeping her perfectly quiet. I will come again in the evening."

So saying, he took his leave, and I again sat down at the door.

And now despair seized me, and I remained in a sort of stupor all day till the doctor came again, when, as before, I assailed him with eager questions.

He tried to encourage me, but I thought he looked very anxious; and so it went on for a few days, till at last he gave hopes of my sister's recovery.

Never shall I forget the tumult of joy with which I received this intelligence. The fountain of my tears was unloosed, and I wept long and unrestrainedly.

During all these days I had scarcely left her door for a moment, but had crouched down, with my head against it, straining my ear to catch the slightest sound from the sick room. Now, however, I felt oppressed—I could not breathe—I must be in the pure open air. I rushed forth, plunged into the densest of the wood, threw myself on the green sward, and there gave vent to the wildness of my delight and joy.

Never but once have I thanked God so fervently as I did then; never but once! and then, too—but I am anticipating.

Long did I remain there, and think over the last few days; and, before I rose to return home, I had read my own heart anew, and had at last learnt to concur fully in Aunt Mary's statement—that, if I trusted in my *own* strength alone, I should be sure to fall.

And then I recalled to myself with sorrow, that for some time before I gave way to that fearful burst of temper, I *had* trusted a great deal to my own strength, and had gradually abated the frequency and fervour of my prayers to the only Being who was strong enough to overcome my temptations. That day I learnt a great and salutary lesson—distrust of self;—and with it came humility. The trial was sharp, but necessary, and its good effects remained when the trial was over.

And now I recalled to myself my conversation with my aunt, and her words—"If not from a higher motive, for *my* sake be gentle to your little sister." And how had I obeyed her? In this, the only way in which I could prove my love and gratitude to her, I had failed. Yes—how could she ever again place any reliance upon me, or feel any belief in my affection, when my deeds so signally disproved my words? She would at last turn against me, like the rest, and believe me ungrateful, and selfish, and hard-hearted.

I wept long and hopelessly.

Now I shrank from the thought of Aunt Mary's return; for I felt that I *could* not meet her—that I *could* not bear *her* coldness.

Oh! the misery of those few days! Often did I entreat and implore to be allowed to see my sister. They said it was impossible, lest I should catch her fever; and they added, that it was a wonder I had not done so already.

Time passed. Edith was rapidly recovering, was at last moved to another room, and, finally, came down-stairs again.

At first, I was not allowed to enter the room where she was; but when all dread of infection was over, they no longer opposed it, and I crept in.

It was dusk, and she did not see me enter. I would have run to her, and covered her with kisses; but her mother (between whom and myself there was now, I felt, an insurmountable barrier) was there, bending fondly over her darling, clasping and kissing the tiny hands, and murmuring words of tender endearment and of joy at her idol's preservation; so I sat down quietly.

The sweet little voice was weak and broken, but it was music to my soul; and its melody floated around me, stilling and turning to harmony the jarring chords within.

Her mamma had been promising her a little carriage; it was to arrive on the morrow, and she was to be drawn in it in the garden. In the midst of her description, the child interrupted with—

"Where's Nelly?"

There was a faint tone of harshness in the mother's voice, as she replied:—

"I don't know, my darling; but never mind her. She is a naughty, wicked child; and you must not speak to her any

more. Do you recollect how she struck you the night before you were ill?"

For a moment, the child could not remember; but soon it all came back to her thoughts; and I knew, by the trembling voice, that the little tender heart was filled with remorse, and that tears were coursing down her cheeks.

"Oh, mamma, she *isn't* naughty! I killed her bird, her little bird, that she was fond of. Poor Nelly! she had nothing else."

And she was sobbing.

"Never mind, darling — don't cry — and Nelly shall have another bird, in a beautiful cage — and *you* shall give it to her!"

"But it won't be the *same* bird — and Nelly won't like it so well. Poor Nelly! I love Nelly — I want to kiss her. Where is she?"

This was uttered so plaintively that I could bear it no longer; but, darting from my corner, ran forward, saying:—

"Here, Edith, darling! And I have forgotten all about the bird — perhaps he would have died of himself! Only I have not forgotten how naughty I was to my little darling sister; and, Edith, I love you better than anything in the world, and I don't want another bird; I only want to see you every day, and to do everything in the world for you; and I will never, never — [here I checked myself] — *if God will help me*, — I will *never* be unkind to you again!"

And little Edith threw her arms round my neck, and pressed her cheek, wet with tears, against mine; and we were both happy.

But now my mother, who had drawn back a little as I advanced, told Edith, in chilling tones, that she must go to bed, as she would be ill again if she sat up till the usual time; so, again kissing me, she allowed herself to be carried away.

How I loved the child! Not even her mother idolised her more than I did. Alas! we all united in spoiling her, and in fostering the weeds and brambles that were already springing up in her heart, until in time they grew mightily, and bore blossom, and fruit, and choked the good harvest which, but for our sinful indulgence, might have been gathered there. Oh, my sister! how do I reproach myself for *my* share in thy undoing!

The next few days were days of comparative bliss to me. I

was not allowed to be much with Edith, for her mother always had some excuse for separating us whenever she found us together; but I used to watch her at a distance, and follow her wherever she went. Never did I weary of devising little schemes for her pleasure or amusement; whatever I saw that was pretty, I immediately coveted for Edith.

And now I had one present in view for her, which would, I knew, afford her the most intense pleasure. I had seen, at a cottage not far off, a little white kitten; this I would buy, put on it a blue collar, and present it to Edith. And so, taking a little basket, I went out before breakfast, intent on the acquisition of this new treasure. The cottage was in the lane, just beyond Aunt Mary's house. Entering the neat little kitchen, which served for "parlour, and kitchen, and all" (there was another tiny apartment, the *salon*; but this was reserved exclusively for visitors), I saluted the inmates, who consisted of an old woman and her grand-child; the latter, a girl of about my own age.

"Please, miss, take a chair," said Mrs. Johnson, overwhelmed by the honour of a visit from any member of "the great house," as the poor people used to call Rocklands.

"It's a poor place for the likes of *you* to come into; but it's a palace to me. I once little thought I should ever be so comfortable in my old age; and no more I should, if it hadn't been for your dear aunt, Miss Dudley — bless her sweet, good face!"

The old woman spoke with deep and genuine feeling; her clasped hands and trembling lips sufficiently betraying the gratitude and love that filled her heart.

How often do we hear the hackneyed expression, "The poor are so ungrateful!" And are the *rich* never so? We bear with the ingratitude of our *equals* over and over again, and live on terms of friendly intercourse with those whose heartlessness and insincerity are beyond dispute, and have, perhaps, been evinced to *ourselves* more than once. But, let a *poor* person fail in the minutest atom of the "pound of flesh," which, Shylock-like, we exact so rigorously (forgetting that we are commanded to "Give, expecting *nothing*" — not even *thanks* — in return), and we throw him off, and inveigh against "the ingratitude of the poor." Perhaps our charity has been extended to that one person only: no matter, we suffer ourselves to be discouraged: we make no further effort to reclaim

that person; the spring of our benevolence is dried up at its source; and thenceforth we bestow all our superfluity of time, money, and feeling on ourselves, or on our equals, who, in general, neither require nor appreciate it. The poor are not, as a class, ungrateful; that is, not if we give them a fair trial. We expect too much from them. Why should we expect to find in their untutored, uncultivated natures, virtues which, albeit they are instilled into *us* in our youth, seldom take *deep* root in our own hearts? We are too apt to forget how sadly the poor child is inferior to us in that early training and instilling of good and moral feelings, which *ought* to—but, alas! too often does not—render *us* victorious in the great battle with sin and temptation. How is it possible for the poor labourer, who, by the sweat of his brow, and by toiling from morning till night, earns his nine or ten shillings a week—how, I repeat, is it possible for him, when he returns home, weary from his day's toil, to instruct his four or five ignorant children? That, you will say, is the province of the *mother*. The mother? She, poor soul, is also working hard to contribute her mite towards the daily portion. She may be either in the fields, or in the houses of some of the great people round about; while her virtually motherless children are either locked up at home for safety, or suffered to stroll about the country at pleasure. Woe be to such children if they live in the neighbourhood of a large town, where vice stalks precocious in infants of their own age! We are much more given to imitate evil than good; what wonder, then, if these poor innocents, unfortified by good principles (poor children! even in that case, their young and pliant natures are incapable of much resistance to temptation), imbibe the germs of future evil deeds—falsehood, theft, murder! Of the children of the poor in large and especially *manufacturing* towns I will say nothing; too much is already known on that head. But you will say, "Our Sunday Schools ought to instruct them in what is right." Reader, have you ever tried to form the character of a child? Let us even suppose it to be a niece, a nephew, a grand-child, a little brother or sister, or even a child of your own. You are in daily and hourly intercourse with that child, and have every possible opportunity of establishing an influence over its mind, through the ties of affection and habitual authority. And yet how often have you to begin

afresh—to go over the old ground. How often do you find that your precepts have fallen on the *ear*, but have not sunk into the *heart*, and that you have laboured in vain? Do you then think it possible that the character of a child can be formed—that it can learn to love good and hate evil—from an occasional attendance at a Sunday school? Are the children of the poor gifted with angelic natures, that they, with their slight advantages and great temptations, should attain goodness, while your own children, to whom the path of virtue is comparatively easy, fail to do so? Besides, whatever good influence may be instilled into the little one in the *school* is frequently nullified by the parents' example during the week; so that the teachers have no chance. To me the wonder is, that the poor, with their scanty advantages and great temptations, are so good as they are! In one respect, indeed, they set us a notable example:—in their kindness to each other. I have often known a poor woman, who has been working hard all day, sit up at night with a sick friend, who was unable to afford herself a nurse; and, not content with that, spare something out of her scanty, hardly-earned wages to supply some comfort for the invalid. I have often known a poor man, after toiling in the fields all day for the support of his family, devote an hour or two to some needy friend, either helping him to till his little garden, or repairing a broken fence, or, in short, performing some simple act of kindness and self-denial.

Oh! ye rich people, the poor *may* be ungrateful, but not as *ye* are! They *may* be vicious, but their vices are *virtues* compared with yours! Before pronouncing them irreclaimably bad, go into their cottages, hear their simple tales, comfort them, *sympathise* with them, relieve their temporal as well as their spiritual wants. If you meet with gratitude in nine cases out of ten, be content with the nine. If you find ingratitude in nine cases out of ten (but, believe me, it will not be so), forgive the nine for the sake of the tenth, and try once more, remembering who has commanded it, and who persevered, in spite of ingratitude such as *we* have never met—persevered unto death, “Yea, even the death of the cross!”

As the good old woman spoke so enthusiastically of my Aunt Mary, my heart warmed towards her, and I told her of all my aunt's goodness to me; and Mrs. Johnson and I became great friends, so that I at last made my request, and the

kitten was immediately deposited in the basket, Mrs. Johnson refusing payment, saying that she felt proud and happy to do anything for one belonging to Aunt Mary.

"I suppose, miss," she added, "Miss Dudley will be looking in upon me in a day or two; for Mabel (my other grand-child, miss) tells me she is coming back to-night."

To-night! My heart beat violently. Hastily saying "Good-bye," and again thanking the old woman for her gift, I departed.

Aunt Mary coming back! How *could* I meet her? How *could* I bear her altered looks and the loss of her affection? I would not see her; I would avoid her. And yet, to avoid my dear Aunt Mary, whose presence had, so short a time before, given me so much happiness! But better even that, than for her to look upon me with my mother's hard, unpitying, unloving glance.

With a heavy heart I reached home, and having first deposited my intended offering in safety in my room, entered the breakfast-parlour.

Edith had one of her naughty fits this morning; something had evidently put her out. She was determined to be quarrelsome and discontented, and all my attempts to soothe her were received in a decided spirit of opposition. At last, when I placed her bread-and-milk before her, at the same time giving her my customary morning kiss, she dashed her little hand in my face, and, pushing the bread-and-milk violently away, upset it over herself and me. My mother spoke, in her calm, cold voice:—

"Eleanor, leave the child alone. Edith, you must not be naughty, darling, or I must send you to the nursery."

These words were addressed to Edith in the gentlest and most loving tone, and with an attempted kiss, which was received in the same way as mine.

"Now, Edith, that is very naughty!" said her mamma, speaking in a tone of gentle sorrow and reproof.

Edith's dignity was ruffled. Pushing back her chair, and looking the very personification of ill-temper, she ran, screaming, out of the room; and in another minute we heard her little feet pattering along the corridor over-head. She had gone to tell her nurse, who, no doubt, condoled with her darling, and added her mite to the evil.

I had soon finished my breakfast, and then followed my

sister up-stairs, where I found her, in a better temper, seated on Mrs. Goodrich's lap, looking over a picture-book.

"Edith, I will show you something *so* pretty—prettier than anything you ever had in all your life!"

Down she jumped, and, putting her little hand in mine, trotted along the passage, and we entered my room, where the first sound that greeted our ears was a faint "Mew!"

"Oh!" cried Edith, "what's that?"

So then I shewed her the kitten, and, putting round its neck the little blue collar, placed it in her lap, and told her it was "her very, *very* own."

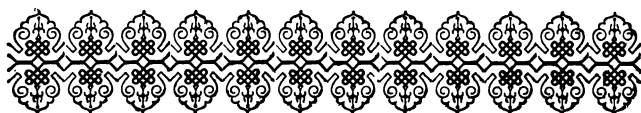
There was a little scream of joy, and a sudden flushing over of the face and neck. I had never seen the child so delighted.

"Oh, Nelly! dear, darling Nelly! The dear, pretty, little white kitten! Edie will never be naughty again! Good, dear Nelly!"

And now nothing would satisfy her till she had taken the kitten down to shew her mamma, who having duly admired it, and even said, to please Edith, that it was "good of Nelly to give it her," she allowed herself to be again placed on the sofa, with the kitten in her lap; for she was still very weak, and the unwonted and forbidden exertion of this morning made her mother fearful, that when the excitement was over, and the re-action ensued, she would be ill.

But Edith continued steadily to recover; and her mother, whose doating fondness seemed to have increased tenfold, set no bounds to her pernicious indulgence. Yet who could wonder at it? With her exquisite beauty, and the inexpressible fascination which pervaded her manner, her voice, her every movement—the enchanting grace and refinement that entered into all she said and did—who could resist her?





Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.—ECCLESIASTES vii. 3.

TO-MORROW came, and with it came Aunt Mary. Dinner was just over, and I had run up stairs to put on my bonnet for my hour in the garden. Edith was to go out in her little carriage for the first time, and I intended to follow her at a distance; but I knew I must not join her, as her mamma would be with her, and would not desire my company. Just as I was descending the stairs, I heard a voice in the hall—Aunt Mary's! My first impulse was to run, to meet her; my next, to fly to my room for concealment. Soon, however, remembering that I might be sent for, I glided quickly and silently down stairs, out by a back exit, and was soon in full flight towards the wood, where I remained until it was time to return to the school-room, when I entered with as much precaution as before; and, as my aunt did not stay to tea, I thus avoided seeing her. This I did for several days.

I was miserable. I longed to see my dear Aunt Mary: it was dreadful to be so near her, and yet not be able to talk to her or see her. Sometimes I thought that anything would be better than this estrangement, and that, even if she *were* cold to me, it would be better than not to see her at all; and then I resolved to remain in the house the next time she came: but directly I heard her voice my courage failed me, and I again fled as before.

On the fourth day after her arrival, however, Edith told me that Aunt Mary was coming to spend the next day. How I trembled! I *must*, then, see her! Full of dread, I took my solitary walk in the garden. I went to the rustic bridge, and sat down in utter desolation of spirit. I had lost all heart for

my playthings, my story-books, even for my beloved bay; and I sat there, with my hands clasped in my lap—the big tears rolling silently down my cheeks.

I heard a footstep. In another moment, Aunt Mary stood beside me.

A sudden impulse made me spring to my feet. I would have fled as before, but her hand was laid on my shoulder. I dared not meet her gaze; but stood, silent and abashed, with averted face, and tearful, down-cast eyes. She spoke:—

“Nelly, it is a sad tale that I have heard; and I am grieved at it.”

Her voice was so mournful that it went to my heart. I would rather she had scolded me than that she had spoken in that sorrowful tone. She continued:—

“When I left you, I *feared* that something of the kind would happen; not only because you were more anxious to please *me* than *God*, but because you relied too much on your own strength. Was it not so, my child? Now tell me, how did it all happen?”

So I told her of all my trials, and of my desperate struggles to be good; of my gradual disheartenment, and final yielding to the tempter. I fancy my aunt had received a somewhat different account; for, as I proceeded with my tale, her manner softened—her arm was passed caressingly round me as of old—and when I concluded my tale with an account of all my sufferings during and after Edith’s illness, and then, overcome by the recollection of my own sorrow, burst into a passionate fit of weeping—she drew me to her heart, and again and again kissed me with more than her old affection.

“Poor dear little Nelly!—and you suffered all this without any one to pity or help you? Was there *no* one to comfort you, and to tell you that though you had done wrong, you might repent and atone for the past? Oh! Eleanor’s child!”

There was a profound anguish in her voice, which told me that her thoughts were with the long past, and with my dear, dear mother.

“But Nelly, though I was away at the time, and you could not then tell me how unhappy you were, why did you not come to me directly I returned? You promised that you would always tell me your griefs.”

“Because, Aunt,” I replied timidly, “because I had this

time been so naughty, that I was afraid you would never love me again; and I couldn't bear the thought of your looking coldly upon me as mamma does ! and besides——"

"Well, dear, 'besides what? You are not afraid of me *now*; so tell me all your thoughts."

"Well, then, aunt, it is this: I promised you that I would, for *your* sake, control my temper, and, more than all, be very good to my little sister; it was all I *could* do for your sake, and to shew how much I loved you. And I meant to— Oh ! I meant to !—and I love you so much—so much !"

And I broke into another violent fit of weeping.

"It was the only thing I could do—the only thing you ever asked me to do—for *your* sake ! And now you will think me ungrateful and deceitful, as they all do ! Oh ! I wish—I wish I were dead !"

My grief was so convulsive that my aunt became alarmed, and for some time could do nothing but soothe me ; when I was calmer, she again spoke—

"My own Nelly—whatever you may do henceforth—whatever fault you may commit—always come to me as soon as you are sorry for it. It can make no difference in my *affection*, however naughty my little girl may be, I can never cease to *love* her; when she is naughty, I am *grieved*—not *angry*."

I clung round her neck in a transport of joy and gratitude.

"Ah, Nelly !" she continued—a gentle tone of reproof mingling with the accents of her low sweet voice—"Ah ! my child—never think that I can love you less than I do !—few mothers love their children so tenderly as I do you ! Do you think that Edith's mamma would ever cease to love her child, whatever faults she might commit ? She might grieve over them, as I do over yours, when I reflect that if you grow up with them, they will cause your misery in this world—perhaps, in the next !"

"Aunt, you will not believe me now if I promise (besides, I'm not *quite* sure of not being naughty again, so I won't promise), but if you watch me, you shall see how I will *try* to be good ; and I will pray to God—often, *very* often—much more often than before ! And He will help me. He must ! He will ! because He never breaks His promises ! And then," I continued, smiling hopefully through my tears, "you shan't have to grieve again for Nelly !"

"Now, indeed," replied my aunt, "I have hopes that my little girl's path will lie more smoothly before her; it may not be strewn with roses — thorns and brambles may lie in the way — but if she is well shod she will pass over them, and crush them beneath her feet, and they will not harm her. You are now, Nelly, likely to succeed; because you have learnt your own weakness, and with that knowledge, has come humility. It has been said by one of the best men who ever lived,* 'The reason why men are not humble is, that they do not see the greatness of God. The angels, though the highest of creatures in excellence and station, are the humblest in spirit; they hide their faces before the glory of the Lord; they have the clearest view of His holiness and glory, and therefore they prostrate themselves in the lowest style before Him.' And again, he says — 'Even among the children of God, if any of them give way to a haughty spirit, a severe rebuke is sure to follow; this we see in the fall of Peter. . . . The humble feel their poverty, and pray for grace, and their prayers are heard. . . . When the sinner breathes the sigh, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!' then he is justified. The moment any person feels himself a sinner, and casts himself upon the mercy of God in Jesus Christ, from that moment he is pardoned, he is accepted, he is lifted up from the dust. . . . The first blessing pronounced by our Saviour was pronounced on the 'poor in spirit'; theirs, as He assures us, is the eternal kingdom. Divested of self, they become heirs of God! Let us, then, seek and cherish this grace, the only temper that can make us shine before God, the only one that can render us blessings to each other.' "

We were silent for a little while; and then my aunt rose, and we turned towards the house.

"Nelly, dear," she continued, "I had intended to leave you to your own thoughts for a few days longer; but you have already suffered so much, and are, I am sure, so truly sorry for your fault, that you have no need of any further punishment. You must come and spend the day after to-morrow, as it is Sunday, with me, and I will then give you a book of sermons, written by the good man whom I have just quoted; they are so simple that though they are intended for grown-up people, they can be understood by a child. I hope you will like them, darling, and that they will help to make you a

* Robert Hall.

good Christian. I have promised to spend the day here to-morrow, and shall beg for a holiday for you; and I hope we shall all be very happy."

As we entered the parlour, my aunt led me forward to my mother, saying —

"I have been talking with Eleanor, and find that she is very, very sorry for her fault; and I do not think she will ever again be so naughty."

My mother's answer was not encouraging.

"Do with her as you like; *I* have given her up! She *hates* my child, and would have killed her, I believe, if I had not been present. I neither believe in her repentance nor in her professed affection for her sister; she *hates* us both. Even if her penitence were sincere, it would be too late; she has forfeited all claim upon my forbearance. And now, let us change the subject — I am weary of it!"

I saw the angry flash in my aunt's eye; I saw her struggle for self-possession; she conquered — and was soon relating, in her low musical voice, her adventures during her absence.

Profoundly sad, I placed a low stool by Edith's sofa, and in silence watched her play with her new pet. How graceful they were, those two young things — so full of life, and spirit, and enjoyment! Edith had given the kitten a ball of thread to play with, and was watching, with intense interest, the gambols of her four-footed friend, as it tumbled, and plunged, and rolled, everywhere and anywhere, regardless of consequences in the excess of its glee. Now and then Edith would pull the thread attached to the ball, and the kitten would make a frantic rush in pursuit of it; when it had caught it, Edith would give another little pull, and the kitten would bite it ferociously, holding it firmly between its fore-paws, and spurring savagely at it with its hinder ones. Then Edith would clap her hands, and laugh and scream with delight. At last the kitten, in its excitement, made a plunge, and, with the ball in its paws, came down on its back, on the floor; here there was a fresh scream of delight from Edith.

"Why, you merry little thing!" said my Aunt, turning round, "who would think you had been ill, to see you now with that laughing face! Nelly looks more like an invalid; she has not said a word this half hour! Never mind; to-morrow evening both your tongues will go fast enough, if I am not mistaken!"

"Why, Aunt?" I asked timidly.

"Because 'a certain good fairy, called Aunt Mary' (that's rhyme, you know), has brought with her, from Brighton, a certain box, containing beautiful things for good little girls!"

Edith's eyes sparkled; in a moment she had slipped off the sofa, and was on her Aunt's lap, whispering in her ear—

"Tell about it! Make it a *story*, you know, it will be so nice!"

And then the little hands were clasped together in her lap, her large eyes were fixed intently on my Aunt, and her parted lips betrayed her excitement at the anticipated wonderful revelation.

"Well, then," Aunt Mary began, in a low mysterious voice, "a box is coming to-morrow evening, filled with beautiful things for two nice little girls. Nelly is one of the little girls; now, who is the other, I wonder?"

"Edie! Edie!"—(clapping her hands in delight). "Go on, Auntie, please; it's so nice!"

My Aunt continued.—"I can't tell you what is in the box, because it would then not be so much fun opening it to-morrow evening; but I *can* tell you, that the things are *very* pretty, and that you must be very good all day to-morrow, or else the box might not come, you know! and what a dreadful thing that would be, would it not?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Edie, in a philosophic tone; and, returning to the sofa, she was for some time lost in thought—speculating, no doubt, as to the contents of the wonderful box. At last she called me to her side, in order to receive the benefit of my superior wisdom. Edie had a very high idea of my intellectual powers, looking upon me, in fact, as quite a grown-up person. So, putting on an expression of profound sagacity, I delivered my opinion on the subject.

"Well, Edie, as I have n't seen what's in the box, and never knew, till now, that there *was* a box for us, of course I can't tell what's in it!"

"No, of course," assented Edith, in a moralizing tone, and shaking her head with the utmost gravity.

"But," I continued, "I think I can guess *one* of the things that Edie will have!"

"Oh! tell Edie, please, Nelly dear!"

"Well, I think there will be a *doll*!" (a safe conjecture as to the contents of any box designed for a little girl).

"Yes! yes! so there will! of *course* there'll be a doll! Go on, please, Nelly."

"Then," I continued doubtfully; "*I think* there may be a bonnet for the doll!"

The little creature's arms were round my neck, her glowing cheek pressed against mine.

"Go on, dear Nelly — tell more — it's so *nice*! What next?"

"Then," I resumed slowly—(for I was rather hard up for an idea)—then—yes, I think—mind I only *think*—there *may* be a picture-book, full of beautiful pictures, with stories about them, which I will read to little Edie in the winter evenings, when the shutters are shut, and the curtains drawn, and the fire blazes so brightly!"

Here I had to tax my imaginative powers for a description of some of the stories; and when I had concluded with—"I can't think of anything more, Edie," she coaxingly whispered—

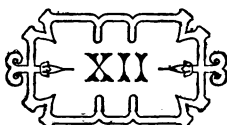
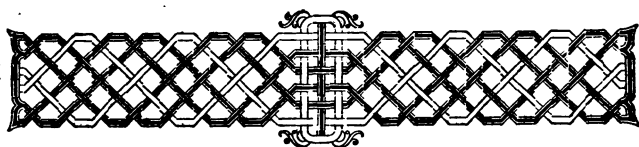
"Tell it all over again, Nelly; it's so nice!"

This "so nice" was a favourite expression of my little sister's, and, uttered by her sweet, plaintive, baby-voice, was the prettiest thing in the world; it conveyed, too, an idea of tranquil, concentrated enjoyment, such as I have seldom met with in a child.

So I told it "all over again"; and, after that, was repeating my narrative for the third time, when we were interrupted by Aunt Mary, who was taking leave.

"Now, darlings — one kiss, and good-bye. If to-morrow be fine, we shall enjoy ourselves. A whole holiday; dinner at one; then, a drive to I——; then, tea; and, after tea, *the box*!"





Ah! how delicious was the morning drive,
The soul awaken'd, and its hopes alive.—CHABBL.

NEVER did the sun shine more gloriously than the next morning. All was bright and joyous; and if the dropping leaves did give a sad foreboding of the coming dreary season, there was an invigorating feeling in the clear sharp air that more than compensated.

Yes, we were all gay; even my mother seemed to feel my dear aunt's sunshine still hovering round her, as she told me that, if Edith were well wrapped up, I might draw her in her little carriage for half an hour. With a heartfelt "Thank you, mamma!" I hastened to avail myself of the privilege; and then Edie and I had much talk about the wonderful box.

How happy we were—we two children—alone! How I wished that it could be ever thus, and that we could have the great world all to ourselves—we three, Aunt Mary, and Edith, and I;—a selfish wish, and one which my dear Aunt, in the expansiveness of her benevolent nature, would not have approved.

Returning, we found my aunt with my mother. Dinner was ready, so we sat down at once; and when it was concluded, we started off for I——.

About half a mile from Rocklands, we passed a large, modern-looking house, surrounded by extensive grounds. The name of this place was Fernley, and it had for some time been untenanted.

"Gertrude," said my aunt, "they tell me that some new people have taken Fernley. Do you mean to call on them?"

"No," replied my mother; "why should I?"

"Well," said my aunt, smiling at her abrupt answer, "it is difficult to name a reason why you should *not*. I suppose you do not always intend to remain the hermit you are at present?"

"But indeed I *do*," said my mother, most energetically. "Why on earth should I, by again cultivating society, surrender the only pleasure now left to me — the uninterrupted enjoyment of my own thoughts, and of the society of my child — to say nothing of the unmolested disposal of my time?"

"Your time?" said my aunt (and there was a little mocking smile playing about the corners of her mouth); "and pray, sister of mine, will you inform me what useful avocations at present result from this 'unmolested disposal of your time'? What single thing that is *useful* ever occupies *your* time? Call when I may, I find you seated with that eternal piece of embroidery in your lap — which work of industry, by the bye, has remained in exactly the same stage of progression from time immemorial. Nay, don't shake your head; I counted the stitches yesterday, and find that you have done but *sixteen* in the last three months? Well, I always find you sitting near the window, that unfortunate embroidery in your lap, your eyes fixed either on the sky or on Edith (rather monotonous occupation, I should think — but there's no accounting for tastes), your thoughts, I was *going* to say, on vacancy; but I will be merciful, and will charitably suppose that they keep company with your eyes. Now, if the occasional advent of a visitor *did* interrupt these important avocations, *would* it be any serious loss to the world in general, or to yourself in particular?"

"But then, Mary, you forget — I sometimes read."

"Ah! you do well to say, 'sometimes.' How often? I ask. And when you do read, are the works you select calculated to improve the tone of your mind? I have always noticed that you choose for perusal works of fiction — replete, it is true, with wild imagination and an immensity of genius, highly calculated to refine and exalt the imaginative powers, but thereby only the more surely to unfit you for intercourse with good every-day people. Such works also tend to disgust you with all those little necessary offices, which every married woman, and every *mother*, ought to consider so many imperative duties. Such books feed the *imagination*, but leave the *soul* to starve. So much for your reading, my dear; and

having proved — I trust, to your satisfaction — that you never turn your time to any useful account, may I ask why you so dread its being occasionally broken in upon?"

"Well," replied my mother, in the tone of a spoiled child, "since you will have it so, I will confess that I do not particularly value my *time*; but my *inclinations* would be sadly outraged by having to abstract my thoughts from the subjects on which they best love to dwell, in order to devote them to people with whom I have no sympathy, in whom I feel no interest — whose society, in short, would be an insupportable nuisance."

"Ah! there spoke the truth. That admission is just what I wanted to bring you to! And now listen to me. All this is selfishness — utter selfishness. You want to be *taken out of yourself*! Don't shake your head — you *do*. Your mind is assuming a morbid tone. I have observed it for some time. When you are seated at that window, with your eyes fixed on vacancy, your thoughts are with the past. Is it not so?"

The large tears were slowly gathering in my mother's eyes.

"There, my darling Gertrude, I am right. I will not tease you any more at present; but I *will* convince you. Besides, another consideration ought to influence you: these children will not always be children, but will be growing up sooner than we are aware of; they will want, and must have, society. Even now they require the companionship of children of their own age."

My mother looked doubtfully at us, and timidly replied:—

"Edith will not be a woman for so long!"

My aunt was not daunted.

"Edith *will* be a woman sooner than you imagine; already she thinks too much of herself, and requires to be taught her own level. And as for Nelly, do you think it right that she should be running about like a wild thing, with no one of her own age with whom to exchange sympathies?"

My mother replied gently, but coldly, that she would think about it, and that whatever was necessary for her husband's eldest child she should have. My mother was always just to me in deed, but not in feeling.

"Then," said Aunt Mary, "I am satisfied; and you will have to call on the new people, and invite them. Mind, I don't pledge myself to their coming up to your fastidious

requirements as to what is agreeable and refined; probably, they will not exceed the average in that respect."

"Indeed, Mary," interrupted my mother, "I shall not call on them. How could I, with any appearance of sincerity, do so, after giving out, as I did, after my great loss, that I must decline all society? I could not know this family without renewing my acquaintance with all the others."

My aunt smiled. She was gaining her point; since she had drawn my mother into arguing, where she had at first given a positive refusal.

"All the others! Is their name 'legion'? I do not believe that you can name more than half-a-dozen families within driving distance! I mean, people whom you knew two years ago. Now, let me count them: there is the rector of —, and his wife and family."

My mother shuddered. "O yes! I remember. The last time I called there, Mrs. Phillips apologised for keeping me waiting, by telling me that that day was the advent of a new cook, whom she — Mrs. Phillips — had been initiating into the mysteries of the culinary department. Now, could you, Mary, with your refinement, like a person who studied cookery?"

"Indeed I could, Gertrude," my aunt laughingly replied.

"I do *not* believe you, Mary.—Well, there was a large basket of work on the table; not fancy-work — not even decent and presentable plain-work — but a vast hecatomb of her own and her children's under-garments; and when I entered, two long girls, of fourteen and sixteen, with great red hands (feet to correspond, for I looked at them to ascertain, and the soles of their boots were a marvel of strength and solidity), were darning the boys' grey worsted-stockings. These were the two eldest daughters of the house of Phillips. The rector himself, poor man! is well enough. Who could help pitying him, with such a wife and family?"

"And yet, Gertrude, the good man is contented; he is really fond of his wife, as he ought to be, for she is an excellent wife and mother, and does her best to make their income go as far as possible; for what would be a very comfortable maintenance for himself and wife alone, is poverty when you add a family of eight children — six of them boys, of whom two are at college. I have a very great respect for Mrs. Phillips; she is an estimable, kind-hearted, unselfish person,

good to her children, the poor, and all around her. And those two tall girls, with the objectionable feet and hands" (she smiled, in spite of herself), "are, I have no doubt, as rich in moral qualities as their mother.—But, to continue our list. There are the Ashtons; not such worthy people as the rector and his family, but nice, kind-hearted people, nevertheless."

"Lady Ashton is slightly vulgar," chimed in my mother; "she is stout, generally looks warm, and sometimes speaks in too loud a voice. Sir William is an old fool; forgetting his age, he makes himself ridiculous with every young girl who comes in his way."

"But that sweet Miss Ashton," reasoned my aunt.

"Ah! yes — his daughter by his first wife. She is a gentle, amiable creature; but that is not a sufficient inducement to me to cultivate her vulgar mother and her idiot of a father."

"But," still pleaded Aunt Mary, "the mother is *not* vulgar. She cannot help being stout, poor woman! and as no doubt she has good lungs, her raising her voice a little now and then is perhaps unavoidable.—But, to continue. What have you to say against the Elliots?"

My mother paused. "Well, I have no objection to them. I like Mr. Elliot, for he is intellectual. Mrs. Elliot may be cold-hearted, but she is a perfectly well-bred woman, and her children and adopted niece are equally unimpeachable."

My aunt continued:—"Then the Graysons, *frère et sœur*?"

"Oh, horrid!" exclaimed my mother; "Miss Grayson is *blue*, and verges on old-maidhood; and her brother is nervous, and twirls his fingers while he is talking, and sits on the edge of his chair, and — Oh! please, don't mention the Graysons."

My aunt could not help laughing. "Now I, on the contrary, *like* the Graysons. Miss Grayson, whom you, in a manner highly complimentary to me, pronounce to be 'verging on old-maidhood,' is not much older than myself; she may be 'blue,' but I think her very well informed, and —"

"Oh, Mary! She wears thick, clumsy boots; and, whatever may be her age, she looks more than forty, and never *could* have had the slightest pretensions to beauty; while you, who are only thirty, and don't look your age by five or six years, will still be admired when Miss Grayson is bed-ridden! Oh! the idea of comparing yourself with her!"

"But her brother," said my aunt, resolved to defend her point, "her brother is the best creature in the world!"

"I don't like 'best creatures!'" was my mother's answer; she was evidently determined not to be forced into any compromise, so far as the Graysons were concerned.

"Mrs. Hammond and her children?"

"Ah! Mrs. Hammond is a dear old thing; and if I could have kept up her acquaintance without being obliged to know the others, I would have done so; and I like the little ones too."

Aunt Mary continued triumphantly — "Sir Frederic Crosier?"

"Yes," said my mother; "he is very agreeable and refined; and his little daughter is a sweet little creature."

"Mr. and Mrs. Annesley?" continued my Aunt, rather doubtfully.

"No," exclaimed my mother, most energetically; "she is a specimen of a class which I abhor — a married flirt! I cannot endure that woman! She is handsome, but bold; clever, but sarcastic; not over well-read; very amiable with *men*, but not so with her own sex. I have a great dislike to her! Her husband is a fool to let her have her own way so completely!"

"Well," said my aunt, "my list of 'eligibles' closes with the two Misses Campbell, and their aunt."

"I have never seen enough of them to pronounce whether I like them or not. — But how many families have you enumerated? A dozen, I should think!"

"The Phillipses — one; the Ashtons — two; the Elliots — three; Graysons — four; Hammonds — five; Crosiers — six; Annesleys — seven; Campbells — eight. Eight families in all, you see! Not such an overwhelming circle of acquaintance — eh?"

My mother would have replied; but Edith, who had been lulled to sleep by the motion of the carriage, just then awoke, and shewed symptoms of being fractious, but on being reminded of the "box," desisted from the same, and immediately subsided into a paragon of virtue. Soon after, we arrived at I——, where we alighted, and walked along the sea-shore, Edith and I shouting with laughter to see the people bathing. And then we mounted two donkeys, to our very great delight,

and rode for nearly an hour, when it was time to return home. We were all very merry; and when we reached Rocklands, and Edith expressed her regret that the drive was over, I reminded her that the best treat of the day was yet to come. So she brightened up, and clapped her little hands, and played on the floor with her kitten till tea-time.

I hardly tasted a morsel for thinking of the box, and felt as if tea would never be over. At last, it was removed; and Edith and I were sitting together on the sofa—our eyes glistening, our cheeks flushed, and our hands clasped in each other's. A large box was brought in, and set down in the middle of the room.

"Now, children," said the cheerful voice of Aunt Mary, "come and help me to undo this wonderful box!"

If it had been opened before its arrival, it would not have been half so exciting to us; and Aunt Mary knew this. I cannot say that we rendered much help; but we fancied we did, which answered my aunt's purpose—and that was to give us pleasure—just as well; for children like to fancy themselves useful. I knelt down, and tugged, in succession, at every knot in the cord, while Edith was beside herself with excitement, and kept jumping round the box, clapping her hands, and uttering a series of "Ohs!"

The cord was undone—the box was unlocked—it was open!—and a mine of treasure was displayed to our enraptured vision;—dolls, books, everything that our most sanguine anticipations could have devised.

We had passed through the various stages of expectation, excitement, and lunacy, and we were now little short of raving maniacs. Our excitement lasted all the evening; and Edith could not be prevailed on to go to bed till half-past ten, when she departed, taking with her about a dozen of the smaller toys and dolls.

I kissed my Aunt Mary, and said, "Good night"; and the tears came into my eyes, and my voice trembled so, that she said—

"What! crying, Nelly?"

"Oh, Aunt!—what have I done to deserve it all? I wish I had been more good while you were away!"

My Aunt kissed me tenderly, pressing me in her arms as if she would have held me there for ever; but my mother was

there, so she only said — “God bless my darling Nelly ! Good night, my child.”

After I was in bed, I lay awake some time. I heard my door open ; and my dear aunt entered, and again kissed me, and called me — “her own child” — “her darling” ! and when she left me, my face was wet — but not with my own tears.

How she loved me !





If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words; then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

ISAIAH lviii. 13, 14.

THE next day was Sunday; and I spent it with Aunt Mary, in the usual way: only, as it was now too cold and damp to sit still in the orchard, we took a short walk after dinner, and then returning, sat at the window, which overlooked the pretty garden.

And then my aunt placed in my hands a beautiful edition of "Hall's Sermons."

"I hope, dear, you will read these with care and attention. The writer was a good man; but he had to bear his troubles in going through life. The world was a thorny path to him! I should like you to read these sermons with me; and if you meet with anything you do not understand, I can explain it to you." Opening the book, she continued: "Let us see what he says about trials and afflictions, and the necessity of patience to bear them."

"Affliction is sent by God: His hand is there. '*Be still, and know that I am God*'; such is the voice to which the afflicted saint replies, '*I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it.*' . . . Consider the gracious and glorious design which God has in afflicting us; it is '*for our profit*'; for nothing less than this, '*that we may be partakers of His holiness.*' It is thus that He would refine us into His

image, and fit us to shine with the saints in eternal light. . . . He that is not thus treated, is not treated as a son. This consideration has always had a great effect on the minds of good men; they knew that God was never more their friend than when He was chastening them. . . . Above all, what are ours to the sufferings of Christ? Was ever sorrow like His when He cried, 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?' Again, what are our troubles, compared with our deserts? 'Why should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sin?' If we merit eternal death (and if we do not, Jesus Christ cannot be our Saviour from it), how mercifully are we afflicted! We have reason to bless God, instead of complaining.' "

Turning back to another sermon, she read on:—

"'Let the afflicted derive comfort. Consider your affliction as a mark of your relation to the Father of your spirits; a proof of His love and care; of His preparing you for His kingdom; He is melting you in the furnace, that you may bear His image. He values you too much not to bestow pains upon you. This is the mysterious process by which He is conducting you to Heaven, and training you for its enjoyment. Be not, then, over-much cast down! Remember the immutability of His promises; the stability of His covenant; the perpetuity of His love! 'Remember the years of the right hand of the Most High!' Let those who have been afflicted seriously consider what has been the effect of their trials upon themselves. If no effect has been produced, what can they expect but 'sorrow upon sorrow?' What but greater severity, since the former chastening has failed of its purpose? It is a fearful thing to have come out of the furnace hardened!—to have produced none of those fruits of righteousness, for the production of which the chastening was sent! Consider, that unsanctified affliction can only be succeeded, either by final impenitence, or by greater affliction in order to our recovery. Let us be anxious that, being made by our trials more patient, more spiritual, we may be found, as gold tried and purified, to praise and honour at the appearing of Jesus Christ!"

My aunt closed the book. She had occasionally stopped to explain the meaning of some word which she feared I might not understand; so that all she had been reading was quite

intelligible to me; and she now asked, gently laying her hand upon my head—"How I liked it?"

"Oh! very much, indeed, Aunt; it makes me see things as I did not see them before; it makes me feel that trouble will not be so hard to bear, now I know that it does not come of itself—by accident; but that God sends it, and for my good. Oh, Auntie, read more to me next Sunday!"

"I will, my darling: and you can, if you like, read to yourself now and then during the week; and if you come to anything you don't understand, tell me, and I will explain it. Ah! my dear Nelly, do not disappoint me!—do not grow up naughty and self-willed! To see you happy, is my first thought in this world; and you must be happy if you are a child of God; for, whatever trials it may please Him to send you, He will always send you His peace—"The peace of God, which passeth all understanding"—to enable you to support them. Believe me, my child, the sharp trials, the bitter disappointments, of the world fall with crushing power upon a heart unfortified to resist them; and the *temptations* of the world are sure to be overpowering, unless we are helped by Him who has said—"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Bring your Bible, dear, and read our Lord's parable of the two houses:—one, founded on a rock; the other, on sand."

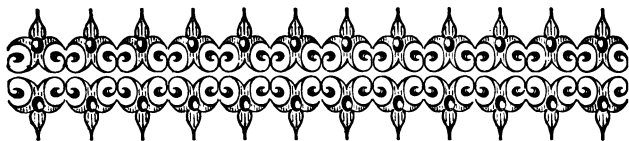
I did so, and when I had finished, my Aunt said—

"My dearest Nelly, your house is now being raised. Oh! may God, in his infinite mercy, grant that it may be founded on a rock—the Rock of Ages!"

That night, when I lay down to rest, I thought much of that parable. Then my thoughts wandered to my little sister, and I hoped that her house would be founded on a rock (Alas! alas! could I have foreseen!); and I fell asleep, thinking of the words—

"And the rain descended, and the floods came, and beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."





Came gallant persons in their red array.

CRABBE.

Mr aunt gained her point; my mother called on the Herberts (the "new people"), and, not wishing to give offence, on her old friends also. My aunt accompanied her to the Herberts'; and on their return, I heard them discussing the merits of their new acquaintance.

"On the whole," said my mother, "I think I like them.—Mrs. Herbert is sensible and unaffected, and appears to be not only well-bred, but well-read—two somewhat rare qualities now-a-days, especially in combination with each other."

"Did you notice that pale, delicate-looking boy?" said my aunt; "I suppose he will inherit the greater part of his father's wealth; that is, if he live, poor fellow! which does not appear a very probable contingency; for he looks very sickly."

"Yes," replied my mother; "Mrs. Herbert told me that he was very delicate, quite the reverse of the younger son, who, though only two years his junior, is taller and stouter, and, she says, enjoys an exuberance of health, that evinces itself in the most unbounded animal spirits; he is now at a private school, but is coming home next week, and will remain there till after the winter vacation. His mother spoke of him with the most evident pride and exultation; and I should fancy him a shocking pickle, though he may be clever and handsome; but I don't like boys—they are rude, untidy, noisy, and everything that is bad. Thank Heaven! I have no sons; and it is not my duty to cultivate the society of such young

savages. I must ask those people to dinner, Mary. I wish it were over."

And my mother sighed, as if the weight of the universe were upon her shoulders.

"However, they have not yet returned our call; and, perhaps, even when I *do* ask them to dinner, they may be engaged; so I will not anticipate evils."

However, they *did* call in a few days; and, soon after, my mother sent them an invitation.

It was so long since we had had any company, that Edith and I were in the highest state of excitement. We skipped about in the drawing-room, viewing with intense wonder the removal of covers from the furniture—an event which had not happened since my father's death. We gazed with delight on the crimson-damask cushions of the chairs and couches, with their white and gold frames; and on the rich Turkey carpet, with its white ground and delicate bouquets of flowers, which looked as if just brought in from the garden, and thrown down here and there without thought or design. And then we admired the curtains of crimson Indian silk, relieved by others of rich white lace, and headed by magnificent gold cornices. I asked Edith, with respect to these, whether she thought the king had any so beautiful; and she replied in the negative. Then we went to each of the six lofty windows to inspect the view, and we fancied that it looked differently from every one of them. And we admired the beautiful birds and flowers on the walls and ceiling, and the large chandeliers (and how we longed to see them lighted), and the costly vases of porcelain, and the splendid mirrors; and we sat down on every one of the chairs and couches, to see which was the softest; and, in short, we were highly delighted: nor do I think we should have left the room that day, had we not been summarily ejected by the servants, who, besides finding us in the way, feared we might ignite ourselves at one of the blazing fires lit at either end of the room.

"Isn't it fun?" said I. "Don't you wish we could see the sight, when the people come into the drawing-room?"

"Oh, yes, Nelly; that *would* be fun!" said Edith, jumping about, as she always did when she was much excited.

"I'll tell you what, Edie, I know exactly what the people will do when they come, for I've found it all out from the servants. When they first come, they will go into the draw-

ing-room. Funny, isn't it, for they can't eat their dinner there?"

"Yes," answered the docile Edith. (If I had required her assent to the proposition of the moon being square, or of fire not burning, or of anything equally improbable, she would have yielded it implicitly—so great was her veneration of my superior knowledge).

"Well, then, Edie, you and I can hide in the dining-room, and we shall see them enter the drawing-room; for we can peep at them from the dining-room door. And mind, you must be very good, and not let them know you are there: you must not make the least noise, or you will not see the show."

"Oh! I will be *so* good, Nelly! I won't cry one bit; no, not even if I fall down, and make my nose like nurse's son's, and knock out all my teeth!"

And Edith looked the very picture of heroic fortitude.

"Oh, Edie! if we were only old enough to be in the drawing-room after dinner, when the people come in and drink tea and coffee out of those beautiful cups and saucers!"

"But I'm not little now," said Edith, who, when it suited her, had an exalted idea of her own importance; "I'm getting a great girl, and I shall soon be old enough to go in the drawing-room and see company."

"Well—you be good to-night at seven o'clock—that's when they come—and we will see as much of them as we can."

We had our customary dinner at one o'clock; and when it was over, my mother said, in her usual tone:—

"You may come into the drawing-room this evening, Eleanor, at half-past eight, when I trust you will not disgrace me by your *gaucherie*. You are old enough to know how to behave; Edith is too little—besides, it is too late for her to sit up."

"My first joyous exclamation of 'Thank you, mamma!' was checked when I saw the piteous look of disappointment in poor little Edith's face. At the commencement of her mamma's speech, she had thought the coveted treat was intended for both of us; and now her little lip quivered, and two large tears rolled down her cheeks. I threw my arms round her, saying:—

"Poor little darling Edie! don't cry, *don't* cry, or I shall

cry too. Oh! mamma, let Edie come in too; she has been wishing for it all day; and she need not sit up so very late; and she will be *so* good; and *she* will be *sure* not to disgrace you, mamma, because she is so pretty and gentle — she is *never* rude nor awkward. And, if not, please, mamma, let me stay in the nursery too. I thought it would be very nice to be in the drawing-room; but I could n't bear to leave Edie crying up-stairs — indeed I could n't! Oh! please, mamma, let Edith come down, or let me stay with her."

My mother was touched — partly by my words, partly by Edith's tears.

"Eleanor, you are a good child, and I am pleased with you. As a reward, I will allow Edith to come down this evening."

Though her words were uttered in cold, measured tones, I felt that I could, if I dared, fall on my knees before her, and kiss her hands; but I only said, "Thank you, mamma!" and Edith and I ran away, to feast in anticipation, on the promised treat.

This was to be my first *début* in society, as well as Edith's; for there had been no company at Rocklands for twelve months before my father's death; so the treat possessed the charm of novelty for both of us in an equal degree. After discussing every possible circumstance connected with the important event, we suddenly fell upon the subject of our toilet. Edith was the first to begin.

"Nelly, I shall wear my blue silk frock, and my pink sash, and my red shoes!"

Edith was very fond of dress; and she considered, that by selecting the brightest colours her wardrobe boasted, she should produce a very grand effect.

"Oh no, Edith! that would not be in good taste! You should wear your blue frock, with the blue sash and blue shoes; or your pink frock, with your pink sash and shoes!"

Edith looked far from convinced, but acquiesced, nevertheless; and then we slipped into the drawing-room again, and again admired everything in it, and wondered what it would look like when the people were there. And so we talked ourselves into an unparalleled state of excitement, and entered the parlor, for our five o'clock tea, with glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes.

Seven o'clock came; and Edith and I were snugly ensconced

behind the dining-room door, which was open. We heard a carriage approaching rapidly along the drive; and then came a loud ring at the bell. Edith and I grasped each other's hands convulsively; her eyes were dilated to their fullest extent, and shone beneath the long velvet lashes, like stars, floating in liquid fire; her cheeks were flushed to a bright crimson — her sweet little mouth was half unclosed — the soft, fair hair was flowing back in silky waves. How beautiful she was! Often, since then, have I thought of her as she appeared that night — so pure, and bright, and unsullied! — too fair a flower for so rude a dwelling-place as this hard world!

The hall door was opened, and a stentorian voice shouted, "Mr. and Mrs. Herbert!"

"Now, Edith!" I whispered.

But she was frightened, and hid behind me, clinging to me with all her might. I peeped forth, and saw a tall gentleman, with black hair and no whiskers, and a lady, neither very tall nor very short; she was dressed in a violet-coloured velvet dress, ornamented with some very rich lace. I thought that she walked very gracefully; but not so gracefully as my mother and aunt. She was rather stout; but not awkwardly so. The drawing-room door was thrown wide open; and the servant again pronounced their names. I dragged Edith forward, to let her see the beautiful room, with part of "the company" in it; in that moment's glance it looked a fairy scene to us. It was a chilly evening; and the two blazing fires shed their cheerful hue over the whole room, preventing the grandeur (as we thought it) looking cold and cheerless — as grandeur is sometimes apt to do. It was but a glimpse; and the door closed.

"Edith, did you *ever* see anything so beautiful in all your life? And would n't you have felt ashamed if Daton had bawled out *your* name, and you had had to go into a large, grand, strange room, and to meet mamma (that they 've only seen *once*) and to be on company manners? — Oh! I *should* be so ashamed!"

Here my speech was cut short by another ring. This time, Edith mustered courage to look on.

"Mr. and Mrs. Phillips!" — and in walked the rector and his wife.

"Oh, Edie! she did n't look half so grand as the other lady! Did she?"

"No!" said Edith, indignantly; "she had n't a beautiful long dress, sweeping on the ground! and she did n't look so like a *Queen*!"

Edith's idea of a "Queen" was as follows;—a lady in a white satin dress; a crimson velvet train trimmed with ermine, profusely adorned with precious stones; a crown, blazing with jewels, on her head—which was further ornamented with three ostrich plumes, *horrent*; and a sceptre in her hand: also, with long black curls, reaching to the ground! It is needless to add, that Edith had never yet met with the counterpart of this portrait of royalty, which she had seen in a small shop in a neighbouring village, and which had been purchased for her by her mamma, at her urgent request, and treasured by her with the utmost veneration; nor did poor Mrs. Herbert bear the slightest resemblance to the portrait in question—for she was an exceedingly lady-like person: but Edith always considered any lady who was richly dressed, and tolerably elegant in deportment, "like a Queen."

"And she had on a common black silk dress. Oh! she was n't half so grand as the other lady."

Here there was another loud ring.

"Sir Frederic Crosier."

"Oh! Nelly, what a beautiful gentleman that was! He was so tall—oh! so tall—taller than *this*." And she stood on her toes, and stretched her little arms in the air, intending to convey an idea of immense height. "Oh! was n't he a beautiful gentleman!"

Another ring.

"Sir William and Lady Ashton, and Miss Ashton."

"Oh! Edie, what a funny man! and he looks as if he never cried, and as if he never tried to be good, and as if he told untruths! But the lady was a nice-looking lady—pretty, don't you think?—with those kind blue eyes, and that nice brown hair."

"Yes," said Edie; "and she wore a nice dress, and it was very long—like the Queen's. And those beautiful, bright jewels!—*were n't* they beautiful, Nelly?"

"Those are diamonds, Edie, dear; and they are found in mines, deep down in the earth, you know."

Edith gazed on me admiringly, as though I were one of the Seven Sages of Greece.

"Nelly knows so much!" said the little flatterer, putting her

little arms round my neck, and pressing her soft cheek against mine.

"Edie will know as much some day," said I patronizingly. "I will teach her if she is a good little girl. But, Edie, did you notice that pretty young lady dressed in pale blue—Miss Ashton? She looked so good and gentle, and so happy—it made me quite long to kiss her."

"Yes," said Edie; "she was a pretty lady; and she had such beautiful white flowers in her hair."

Another pull at the bell.

"Mr. and Miss Grayson."

And a pale, thin young man, of about thirty, with his sister, who must have been a few years older, on his arm, shambled into the hall.

"Oh! Edie, what a funny gentleman! He was n't at all pretty, and he seemed in such a hurry, and he could n't get his gloves on, and his handkerchief was turned half-way round his neck." And I laughed heartily.

"Yes," said Edie, adding her mite of condemnation; "yes, and the lady with him, in that ugly grey silk dress, so short and so scanty. And her little funny curls; and her little eyes; and no nice white gloves, like the other ladies, but nasty black mittens! Was n't she a fright, Nelly?"

"Yes, a horrid fright!" was my charitable rejoinder.

Another ring.

"Mr. Percival."

And I beheld my darling clergyman, who preached such nice sermons at Aunt Mary's church. He was tall, young—about twenty-four—and very gentlemanly in appearance.

"Look, Edie, look! That is the nicest gentleman that ever was born—and so good! Oh! *is n't* he beautiful? Such a high, grand forehead; and such beautiful, large, brown eyes; and such long eyelashes! And oh! Edith, has n't he lovely brown hair? Ah! he *is* so good! *Is n't* he beautiful?"

"Yes," said Edie, "like a *king*; only he has n't a crown on his head."

As I knew this was the highest eulogium Edith could bestow, I felt much gratified. Another carriage now drove up, containing Mr. and Mrs. Annesley, who completed the party. Edith gazed in admiration on Mrs. Annesley's pale pink satin dress, richly trimmed with blonde, and on the pearls on her arms and neck, and in her dark hair."

"That lady is a very fine lady," said Edie; "but I should not like her for my mamma. What a beautiful dress!"

Symptoms of dinner now beginning to evince themselves, I judged it prudent to beat a retreat, which we did with the most perfect success; and then we ran up to the nursery, where we found Mrs. Goodrich engaged in preparing our toilet.

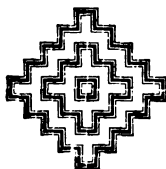
When it was completed, we descended the stairs.

"Nelly," said my little darling, "I feel ashamed. S'pose the company are in the drawing-room, and they all stare at us when we go in!"

"Oh," said I, "we are such little things, that perhaps they won't notice us."

"Yes they will," said Edie, "because we are so grand. You go first, Nelly."

But when we entered, we found no one there; so we sat down with our hands crossed in our laps for half an hour, not daring to move, lest we should make ourselves untidy.





The fair one who is ever in the career of amusement, may for a while dazzle, astonish, and entertain; but we are content with coldly admiring, and fondly turn from glitter and noise to seek the happy fire-side of social life, there to confide our dearest and best affections.

Yet some there are, who mingle freely with the world, unsullied by its contaminations; whose brilliant minds, like the stars of the firmament, are destined to shed their light abroad, and gladden every beholder with their radiance — to withhold them from the world would be doing it injustice; they are inestimable gems, which were never formed to be shut up in caskets, but to be the pride and ornament of elegant society.

WASHINGTON IRVING.

At last the dining-room door was heard to open, and the ladies came out. In another moment they would be in the drawing-room.

“Nelly, I’m frightened. I want to go to the nursery,” said Edith, clinging to me.

I was horribly frightened myself, but I tried to re-assure her; and the company entered. Directly Edith caught sight of her mamma, she dashed wildly forward, as to a haven of refuge. My dear Aunt Mary, no doubt imagining what must be my confusion on this my first entrance into society, at once advanced to where I sat, trembling, and hardly daring to lift my eyes; and, sitting down beside me, and taking my hand in hers, at once put me at my ease.

My mother and my aunt were dressed very simply, in rich black silk; for though it was nearly a year and a half since my father’s death, they had not yet quite left off their mourning. They wore no ornaments, except some very fine pearls;

and their magnificent hair was dressed as usual, without the addition of either lace or flowers.

But, even thus, how superior they looked to their more richly attired guests! Since then I have been in many ball-rooms, and have had pointed out to me for my admiration many acknowledged belles—and that, too, in that Great Metropolis, where all that is elegant, and rich, and beautiful, is congregated; but I have seen none who have surpassed, in *refinement of exterior*, my mother and my aunt.

Mrs. Annesley was a very handsome woman; she had splendid black hair and brilliant eyes—too brilliant, I thought, for they were always flashing and gleaming, and looking about her;—there was no *repose* in them. She had a rather aquiline nose, and a fine mouth—a little too large and full. She had too much colour, I thought; and her prevailing expression was one of audacity, slightly mingled with ill-temper. She was very tall, and had what is called a fine figure; but that, too, was wanting in refinement and repose. She was standing beside my mother, before the large fire-place. She spoke; and I did not like her voice, which resembled, so to speak, her face and figure.

“This is an *unexpected* treat” (glancing at us, with a sarcastic expression, as if she were thinking to herself, “Why are not those little wretches in bed?”); “I did not hope for the pleasure of seeing your daughters. I am charmed!”

She was no match for my mother, who, seeing through her at once, replied, with the utmost politeness of manner, yet in her most frigid tone:—

“Are you? I am surprised to hear it. It proves that we ought never to credit the *on dit* of the million. I had always heard that you did not like children.”

Mrs. Annesley bit her lip; but she was not to be defeated so easily.

“Oh! as to that, I certainly do not like the *gêne* of having children incessantly about me; but it is always a pleasure to me to see well-behaved children—though some ill-natured people say that it is injudicious in parents to force their prodigies on people’s attention, by introducing them in the drawing-room when they ought to be asleep in their beds, to the infinite annoyance of strangers to their perfections, who are insupportably bored by having to caress and flatter the little darlings (lest the fond mammas take offence), while they internally

wish them some thousands of miles away. But I, as I have said, do not agree with these people, and think it very unkind of them to make such comments."

Her lip curled, and there was an ill-natured flash of triumph in her eye. She thought she had annoyed my mother; she was mistaken, for Mrs. Annesley was beneath her anger, or, if she excited it for a moment, my mother did not allow it to appear. She only answered, with the coldest irony:—

"You are right, Mrs. Annesley; and your remarks evince your usual good sense. Believe me, such ill-natured comments are made by old maids and childless persons only. They, ignorant of parental feelings, are not aware that a higher duty is owed to the children than to the guests; nor can they understand, that, were the admission of visitors to be the exclusion of the children, the former would scarcely be very welcome. Yes, such remarks always emanate from disappointed old maids, or, much the same thing, wives without children, whose envy and rancour are generally excited against all who are in that respect more fortunate than themselves. But—forgive my not having asked before—are *your* little ones in health?"

Mrs. Annesley flushed to the temples as she replied, in a voice choking with suppressed rage and mortification:—

"I thought you were aware—I have no children."

"Oh, pardon me!" said my mother, with her most engaging smile. "How very thoughtless of me! But we have not met for so long, and one forgets——"

And she turned away with a merry sparkle in her eye, for she had triumphed; she had touched Mrs. Annesley in a vulnerable point. Though she and Mr. Annesley had been married six years, they had no family—a bitter disappointment to her husband, not only because he was very fond of children, but because he wished for a son to perpetuate the family name. My mother was rather hard upon Mrs. Annesley, but she had drawn it upon herself; for, even before her ill-natured speech, she had noticed her hastily snatch her dress away from proximity with little Edith's foot, and move a step or two farther off.

All the ladies noticed us, and spoke kindly to us; and good Lady Ashton rose in my mother's opinion, by saying to her—

"You must be very proud of these little darlings!"

My mother answered, with her most beaming smile:—

"Indeed I am. What else have I to care for?"

(She was thinking of Edith—not of *me*.)

And then Lady Ashton took Edith in her lap, and talked to her in the pleasantest way imaginable.

"Mrs. Dudley, you have really caused me to break the tenth commandment! Don't be *too* sure that I succeed in keeping the eighth! I *covet* this child, and quite long to steal her. I have no children of my own (except dear Minnie, and she was quite grown-up before I became her mamma), and I so envy those who have. What would I not give to be the mother of this perfect little creature!"

Miss Ashton was talking to me, questioning me as to my tastes and pursuits, and asking me all about my books and toys; and then I gave her the history of the wonderful box.

"Your Aunt Mary is very good to you, I think; you ought to love her very much!"

"Oh, yes!" I exclaimed, clasping my hands fervently; "Oh, yes! I love her more than any one in the world! I never loved any one like Aunt Mary; and I never shall, in all my life."

"You are a dear, grateful little girl," said Miss Ashton, "and as good as you are — Well, I won't say what I was going to; but don't you think you could manage to spare a little wee bit of affection for *me*? For I think that, if I saw much of you, I should be very fond of you indeed."

"Yes," I replied, gratefully, yet timidly, "I have room in my heart for a great many more people. I have only Aunt Mary and little darling Edie to love; and they love me, too."

"But you forget your mamma!"

"Ah! but she is not my *own* mamma! My own dear, beautiful mamma, died long ago, and I never saw her; but her picture is up-stairs, and she is so beautiful, and looks so good and kind! Oh! I love my *own* mamma dearly—dearly!"

"But your other mamma—you love her too?"

"Yes"—I hesitated—"yes, I love her; but—but—"

Miss Ashton saw my embarrassment, and half-guessed the cause. She answered:—

"I am sure she is very indulgent to you; not many little girls of your age are allowed to appear in company—in grown-up company, I mean. And you are so beautifully dressed! There seems to be no difference made between you and your sister."

"My mamma is *very* good to me," I answered, "and gives me everything I want; and I love her."

We were now interrupted by the entrance of the gentlemen. As Mr. Percival made his appearance, I gazed on him with a sort of reverential wonder. Seating himself beside my aunt, whom he had known from childhood, he said something to her, and she beckoned me to approach. He drew me gently towards him, and kissed my forehead.

"So this is the little girl who is so good and attentive in church?"

I hardly knew where I was. To be praised by the wonderful Mr. Percival, whom even Edith pronounced "like a king"!

"Do you like going to church?" he continued.

"Yes, sir, very much, when I go with Aunt Mary."

"Oh, indeed! Then, I suppose, you *don't* like it when you go with any one else—eh? and why?"

"If you please, sir, I would rather not say—"

My aunt smiled. "Tell him, dear." I obeyed.

"I like going with Aunt Mary, because I like to go anywhere with *her*, and because I can understand the sermons in *her* church, and don't feel inclined to go to sleep: and I dislike to go with any one else,—first of all, because Aunt Mary is not with me, and, next, because I get tired and sleepy in the other church, and long to be away."

I might have added, that, in the latter case, I was with my mother, and was therefore under the disagreeable feeling of constraint which her presence never failed to impose upon me.

He smiled. "Candidly spoken, at all events, you little flatterer! But now tell me:—when you are in Aunt Mary's church, do you think of the prayers and the sermon *all* the time you are there? And do you *never* wish to be away?"

"I never wish to get away from that church, but—" Again I hesitated, for I felt that I was about to sink terribly in his opinion.

"Well, tell the truth. Do you ever think of something else during the prayers, or while I am preaching? Now, answer me truly."

"Well, sir," I faltered, "I never think of anything else while you are preaching (oh, yes, though, I did once, a long time ago, when I had broken Edie's doll, and wanted to give

her a new one, but had not enough money; but it was *only* that once); but when the prayers are going on, I do sometimes forget where I am, and think of dolls, and books, and other things; but I am very sorry, and I will try not to do it any more."

And I looked up nervously in his face, expecting a rebuke.

But no rebuke came. Laying his hand gently on my head, he smiled upon me, a kind loving smile, as he replied:—

"My child, you have told me the truth. Always speak the truth, for it lies at the bottom of all that is good and noble."

And he added, turning to my aunt:—"A fine, ingenuous nature. Your pupil does you credit; though I suspect you have been tilling in a most fertile and yielding soil."

"True," said my aunt; I found great *faults*, but no *mean-nesses*; there is nothing little there. I found a spirit keenly alive to injury or injustice, and prone to resent it; and also a heart profoundly susceptible of gratitude—all the sensibilities keen to a degree that will, I fear, mar her happiness in the world."

Reader, you must not suppose that, at that time, I understood all the conversations I have recorded: portions of them, indeed, were intelligible to me; but the greater part were related to me by different persons, years afterwards.

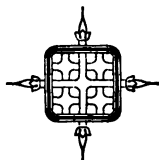
Mr. Percival crossed over to speak to my mother, and to notice little Edith, who was, all this while, a perfect miracle of goodness and lady-like deportment; and Aunt Mary left me, to converse with Mrs. Herbert.

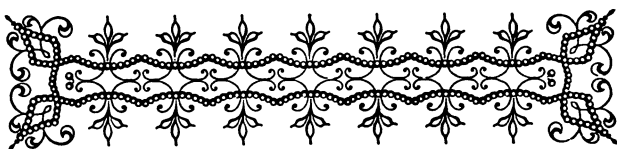
Mrs. Annesley had managed, as usual, to draw round her a small knot of gentlemen, all of whom would far rather have been talking with my mother or my aunt; it was "a way she had;"—she always *invited* the attentions of gentlemen—my aunt and mother *repelled* them. Could Mrs. Annesley only have known that she was little more than the *butt* of the very men who now clustered round her as if to do homage to her beauty, she might have felt less gratified than she evidently was. Could she have heard the derisive—nay, even *coarse*—epithets with which, in her absence, her name was coupled, she would have regarded their attentions in their proper light—namely, as an *insult*. She was now laughing and talking most animatedly, and she certainly looked very handsome; for she was pleased, and the shade of ill-temper had almost

vanished from her brow. Yet I did not like her; and I felt, with my little sister, that I would not have her for my mamma.

"Eleven o'clock!" said my mother some time after, "and that child not in bed!"

Edith had been in a sort of doze for the last hour and a half; but, awfully impressed by the grandeur of her position, had refused to go to bed. Now, however, she kissed her mamma, and suffered me to lead her from the room.





In joyous youth what soul hath never known
Thought, feeling, taste, harmonious to its own.

PLEASURES OF HOPE.

TIME passed on very pleasantly, and the winter was coming fast. The wind howled mournfully among the leafless branches, the bright flowers had nearly all disappeared, and everything looked blank and chill out of doors; but within, when at night the curtains were drawn, and the fire blazed and threw a ruddy glow over the large drawing-room (in which we now always sat in the evening), and when my little sister nestled close up to me, with her arms round my neck, and her glowing eyes fixed earnestly on my face, whilst I read to her wonderful fairy tales out of some of the books Aunt Mary had given me, it was so delightful, that I could not regret the bright summer. In the morning it was very different; no nice run in the garden before breakfast, no pleasant communing with my own thoughts in my darling bay. The ground was damp; a heavy dew lay on the grass; and, even if my mother had not forbidden my going out so early, the chill, raw air would have made me feel only too glad to press as closely as I could against the bright fender of the nursery fire. As my mother had foreseen, her seclusion once broken in upon, she was forced — *bon gré, mal gré* — to enter again into society. She might, perhaps, have made a resolute stand against it, had she not thought it desirable for me to associate with children of my own age; and she could not, without giving offence, cultivate the society of one family, and not of another. So she duly returned their calls, accepted their invitations, and had already, with my aunt, dined out several

times. I had been to spend the day with good Lady Ashton, and had enjoyed it much; and Miss Ashton was so kind to me, that I returned home full of her praises. Sir Frederic Crosier had called, bringing with him his little girl; and my mother had invited her to spend the day, to Edith's very great delight. I, as yet, had no friend of my own age; for my mother had had no opportunity of introducing me to those families who had young children — the Elliots and Hammonds having been otherwise engaged on the day of her dinner party. Still, I did not much regret it; for I had little Edith and Aunt Mary — who was a host in herself; and my life would have been one of unalloyed felicity, but for the continued aversion of my mother — do what I would, I *could* not overcome it. I used to watch her eye, that I might find out everything she wanted, and bring it to her: her only answer would be a quiet bend of the head, and a cold "Thank you." I used to follow her and little Edith in their walks, watch them from a distance, and wish — oh, how earnestly! — that I too had a kind mother; or else, that this beautiful, cold, haughty mamma would unbend, and try to love me a little. Aunt Mary told me to be patient, and to hope. I had no heart for it; patient I could be, but not hopeful.

One day I was walking sadly at the extremity of the grounds, which adjoined those of our neighbours, the Herberts. I felt very lonely and desolate, for my mother had that day been more repelling than usual. I had that morning ventured to lay upon the cloth, in her place, at breakfast, a little bouquet of the few remaining flowers that I had been able to find. She had evidently noticed them, and had guessed whence they came, but had not even taken them up; and the servant had removed them with the cloth: and I saw that she was anxious to discourage any show of affection on my part. I understood her, and my eyes filled with tears, which she did not see.

And now I was walking sadly along, thinking of all this; the bitter tears *would* fill my eyes, but I kept brushing them away.

I was startled by a voice exclaiming:—"I say, little girl, what are you crying about?"

And a tall handsome boy leaped over the hedge, and was by my side in a moment.

"Don't be frightened; I'm not going to eat you. Now, what's the matter."

He spoke so kindly, though in a somewhat off-hand tone, that the sudden terror with which I had at first regarded the intruder vanished, as I replied:—

“I would rather not tell you. But who are you?”

“I’m Oscar Herbert. I’m nearly fourteen years old, and I’ve left school for good.”—And he looked rather important.—“I suppose you are one of the little Dudleys—eh?”

“Yes,” I replied; “and my name’s Nelly; and I am nine—nearly ten; and I don’t go to school at all, but have a governess at home.”

And, in my turn, I did the grand.

“Well, I am very glad of that; for you are a nice, pretty little girl, and I think I shall like you very much.”

So then we entered into an amicable discourse, and exchanged mutual interesting pieces of intelligence.

Oscar Herbert was tall and slight, and very fair. His light-brown locks were thrown back carelessly from his open, manly brow, under which beamed a pair of blue eyes, capable of conveying all expressions, each in a perfectly equal degree. Roguish, sad, haughty, abstracted, merry, affectionate—there was no end to the variety of expression in Oscar’s eyes. He had a beautiful mouth, but it was rather too firmly cut, betokening too much pride and self-will—too little self-denial and submission to others. And that was Oscar’s great fault; he never controlled either his temper or his inclinations, and always acted from his *impulses*—which, however, it must be owned, were generally good. So much for Oscar Herbert, whom I have described rather minutely, because I afterwards saw a great deal of him, and because he will be a prominent character in my tale.

My life was now much pleasanter; for this was the first friend of my own age I had ever had, and we soon told each other all our secrets, and became inseparable companions. We read together books of fairy lore and tales of wild adventure; and he was fond of identifying himself with the heroes of such tales, while I was always the heroine—generally a princess, and, of course, very beautiful. Ah! those were happy days, such as can never come again—never—for the youth and hope which then gilded them with their own glorious sunshine have vanished for aye. Another *kind* of happiness has succeeded, and—but I must not anticipate.

Sometimes Oscar ventured into the house, but very seldom;

for, as I knew my mother's dislike to boys, I did not press his visits; but I met him every day out of doors, and we grew very fond of each other.

How happy I should have been, but for my mother's coldness! Often, after spending an hour with my new play-mate (my "brother," as I used to call him), during which time I had been so happy that I had forgotten almost everything else, I returned home, glowing with health and excitement, to be chilled immediately on entering the house by my mother's coldness and aversion. I bore it all patiently, thanks to my dear aunt's unceasing efforts to keep me in the right way.

I have had many and great blessings in the course of my chequered existence; but the greatest of all has been the gentle, beneficent influence which this kind friend exercised over my early days. She was God's human instrument in rescuing me from a career on which I shudder to think. For the first few years of my life, I was in danger of being ruined by too much severity; later, by over-indulgence; and from both these perils she saved me. Blessed be "the great Giver of all good gifts," that He sent me, in time, so inestimable a boon! How I loved her! What perfect confidence and unreserve existed between us! I used to tell her all I did; and she took an interest in the merest trifles if they concerned me.

I now spent every Sunday with her, as well as every Thursday evening; and it was the greatest delight to me. I always returned home quietly happy and thoughtful, and prepared to bear patiently my one only sorrow, and to bless God from my heart for all the mercies with which I was surrounded. At this time I was imperceptibly gaining a strength that was to support me under trials such as do not fall to the lot of many; I was donning the armour that was to fit me for the great battle of life.





For now, behold, the joyous winter days.

THOMSON'S SEASONS.

COLD, chill December had come; "the nasty winter!" as Edith called it, when she came down stairs in the morning, with her little hands and nose quite blue with cold. To me it brought so many delights, that I did not think it at all "nasty;" though I could not help missing the warm sun, and bright flowers and birds. I rose at seven; and, before coming downstairs, read some of my beloved Robert Hall. At eight o'clock we breakfasted; then we had a quarter of an hour's good romp in the nursery, to warm our feet; after which we went to the school-room, where Edith made a show of learning her letters for half an hour only, while I remained at it in real good earnest until twelve o'clock, when my hour of freedom came, and Oscar was in waiting for me. In the afternoon I had another hour with either Oscar or Aunt Mary. After tea, Edith and I used to amuse ourselves in various ways; sometimes by playing at "land and water" with the shadows on the carpet, sometimes delighting ourselves with some of the contents of Aunt Mary's wonderful box — an endless source of recreation. But nearly every evening, my little darling would climb into my lap, put her arms coaxingly round my neck, and beg for a fairy tale. Would that it could have been ever thus! Fancy, my reader, such a scene: — The large, splendid drawing-room; at one end of it, drawn close to the blazing fire, a round table, on which stood a lamp, which threw its brilliant yet softened rays for some yards round, leaving the other end of the room in obscurity. Seated at this table, at one side of the fire, was my mother, engaged in either reading

or work; on the other side stood a large, comfortable, easy-chair, in which I sat, with Edith clinging round my neck. There was a pause; Edith's eyes were fixed expectantly on mine. I opened the book, and commenced:—

“The Scarlet Cloak.

“Once upon a time, there lived in a wood a little girl, whose name was Innocence; she dwelt with a person called Untried Courage. She name of the wood was Seclusion, and the cottage was called Fancied Security; some persons (who did not very well understand the locality) called it ‘Partial Security.’

“‘Well,’ her companion said to her one day, ‘you will soon have to set out on your journey; they say that it is full of perils, but *I* don’t believe it; and I should not be at all afraid to undertake such a journey.’

“‘Nor am I,’ said little Innocence, who was very brave when she had such a friend by her side. ‘When must I go?’

“‘Why,’ said Untried Courage, ‘since you *must* go, the sooner the better, *I* say; and so little do I fear the dangers of the route, that I will bear you company.’

“So, the next morning, they started together.

“This little girl was very beautiful — so beautiful, that every one loved and admired her. She had sweet clear eyes, and a pure open brow, and her fair hair floated gracefully in the breezes of that lovely spring morning. The sun shone brightly — not a cloud was visible in the heavens — the birds carolled gaily as they flitted about hither and thither, or rested on the branches of the trees overhead; and, as far as the eye could reach, the path was covered with beautiful flowers. As the little girl bounded along in her pure white robe — *so* pure, *so* white, unsullied by a single fleck or stain — she said to her companion:—

“‘Oh! Untried Courage, there is no danger! Look at the sky; there are no storms coming! Look at the path that lies before us, so smooth, and wide, and strewn with beautiful lilies and roses! Where are the sharp rocks and the rugged flints they tell of? Where are the pits and bogs they warned me against?’

“‘Where, indeed?’ said Untried Courage. ‘But we shall soon be out of the wood. Come, let us quicken our steps.’

"They did so, and were soon on the outer edge of the wood, which they were now quitting for the first time. But when they left its sheltering foliage, and saw the great world beyond, Untried Courage fell sick and died.

"Then the poor little girl sat down and wept bitterly, for she was terrified at finding herself alone in that great place. And, as she wept, she heard a voice speaking to her, and looking up she saw a bright creature standing over her, who said:—

" 'I am your good genius, and I am come to help you, and to direct you on your way, if you would avoid the terrible snares which lie before you. But, first of all, you must discard that mantle of Self-Confidence which you have wrapped round your white robe; and, if it will fit you, you must wear in its stead the mantle of Religion; which, if made of the true material, will *never* wear out, and will protect you in all the storms you will meet with on your way. You should also wear the shoes called Endurance; any others will wear out long before the end of the journey, and your feet will be raw and bleeding.'

" 'Oh, give me this garment and these shoes!' cried the little girl, entreatingly.

" 'Nay, my child'—and the good genius shook his head mournfully—'Neither I, nor any other, can *give* them to you; but you can, if you like, get them for yourself.'

" 'Tell me, oh, tell me,' said the child, 'where I can get them!'

"The good genius drew from under his robe a little book, and placing it in a small bag, tied it round the child's neck.

" 'That book,' said he, solemnly, 'is called The Word of God; and it will tell you, not only what you seek to know, but much besides; and if you study it well, it will be your safeguard in all dangers. And here, take this sword; it is very strong—in fact, all powerful; do not forget to use it.'

"And the good genius bound it to the side of the little girl.

"Ah! my child, you will have to undergo many dangers; and unless you know the real names and characters of your enemies, you will not be able to resist them. Take this tablet—consult it often. After you have met any person on your way, look on it, and it will tell you the name and character of that person; so that, if he is an enemy, you may be on your

guard the next time you meet him. But the tablet will never tell you this on first acquaintance with such persons; for its name is Experience, and its office is to make every trial fortify you against the succeeding one. And now, little girl, farewell! I grieve for you, because you have not the mantle of religion and the shoes of endurance. Your parents should have placed them on the threshold, for you to take as you went out; for though they cannot be *forced* upon a child, they should be placed before her, that she may take them if she choose. Farewell, little maiden! Forget not the book and the sword."

And the good genius, sighing heavily, spread his radiant wings, and was soon out of sight.

"At first the little girl felt sad; but she thought of her book, and opening it, looked in to see if it would tell her where she was to find the wonderful shoes and cloak; but as she could not discover it in a moment, she became impatient, and shut the book, saying to herself:—

" 'Why should I give myself so much trouble about things that I may never want? Time enough to look for them when the sky is covered with clouds, and the ground strewn with sharp stones and flints; but that will never be, I think.'

"And she drew her mantle of Self-Confidence more closely round her, and tripped gaily on.

" 'Ah! who is that nice-looking person, I wonder!' said the little girl, as a well-clad person approached and took her by the hand, saying:—

" 'We will travel together, if you like.'

" 'With all my heart,' said the child; and they walked on together very pleasantly.

"By and bye they heard a low cry, and saw a little girl sitting by the road-side; and she seemed in trouble, for she was crying; and she said:—

" 'Oh! kind little girl, I am weary and sad. I am an orphan, and have no one to love me—no one but God'—and she looked up reverently as she spoke. 'Oh! give me some of that nice fruit in your basket; for you have plenty to spare, and I am sorely in need of it.'

"Now, this fruit was called *affection*. The little maiden was about to give some to the sick child, when her companion interposed.

" 'Nay,' he said, in his cold, unloving voice; 'Nay, keep it

for yourself; you can't have too much of it, I can tell you; and you won't find many people in the world to re-fill your basket for you !

"So the little girl replaced the handful of fruit in the basket, and walked on. After that, she gave nothing away; and she ate up all the fruit herself, and thought she had done very wisely; but the next day it made her ill, and she became worse, and lay down by the road-side to die, while her companion stood idly looking on, not helping her in the least.

"Ah! why did I listen to the advice of this stranger? If I had but given the fruit to the little girl, she might have been my companion — and a very pleasant one too! Can this be one of the enemies whom the Good Genius told me to avoid? I will look on the tablet.'

"So she looked, and there saw an exact resemblance of her friend; and his name was *Selfishness*.

"Ah! I know you now!' said the little girl, indignantly; 'I see how hateful you are, and will have no more to do with you.'

And she gave Selfishness a slight blow; but as she did not use the sword he only laughed, and retreated a few paces, intending to rejoin her when her illness was over.

"As the child lay there, full of sorrow, she saw the little orphan girl come trudging along the path, singing gaily; and she said, with trembling —

"Little girl, don't beat me; for I am sick and helpless.'

"The new comer stopped, and placed her cool hands on the burning temples of the poor little maiden, saying —

"Beat you? No! Why should I, when I love you?"

"Why do you love me?" sobbed the poor sick child; 'I don't know you. What is your name? If I were you, I should *hate* instead of loving!'

"The child answered, in a low, sweet voice — 'My name is *Christian*, and I never hate *any one*. I could not, without changing my name for another. You, poor child, have changed *your* name since you started on your perilous journey!'

"The little traveller started, and looked frightened. The other continued: —

"When you left Seclusion, your name was *Innocence*; but I now see, by the spots on your white robe, and the stain on your forehead, that you have lost that title.'

"The wanderer sighed, but answered not; for she felt that it was true. Then the strange child brought water from a brook, and bathed the head of the little sufferer, and spoke words of kindness and consolation to her. And the little wayfarer said —

" ' Ah, stay with me ! for I am sick, and alone ; and be my companion on this fearful journey ! ' "

" But Christian answered, ' Nay, I can do you no further good ; and I may not tarry, for I am told, in this book, to 'press on,' and that, too, ' while it is day.' Besides, our paths are different ; mine is straight and very narrow, while yours is broad. I dare not wait. Farewell ! ' "

" As she was turning away, the little invalid saw that she was clad with the very mantle she had been seeking to obtain, and that she was shod with the same shoes. So she cried, ' Little girl, give me that mantle and those shoes ! Oh ! give them me ! ' "

" But the little girl answered very quietly : ' Nay, I may not part with them, nor would they suit you ; but, if you would have some to fit you, you must seek them for yourself, and that good book will tell you where they are to be found. ' "

" But two persons now came up, and whispered in the little pilgrim's ear ; their names were *Envy* and *Discontent*. And when she had heard what they said, instead of being grateful to Christian, she stretched forth her hand, and tried to wrest from her the desired clothing ; but she could not ; and, besides, she saw at a glance that the cloak and shoes which fitted the little girl so nicely, would be no protection to *her* : so she loosed her hand, and Christian, with a look of sadness, left her.

" Then came *Hatred* and sat down beside her, and prompted her to cast stones after the little child who had been so good to her ; but they all fell short of the mark. So she sat there, and was very sad ; and *Despair* came to her, and said, ' Give up the journey ' : and she lay down, and closed her eyes, and thought she was going to die ; but she was only asleep.

" She slept long ; and when she woke there was no one near her but a little tiny, weak child, who clasped its hands entreatingly, saying—

" ' Oh ! take me to your heart. My name is *Repentance* ; I have not been long born ; and I am so little and weak, that

unless you cherish me I shall die. I am perishing for want of food.'

" 'And what food must I give you?' asked the wanderer.

" 'It is called, 'thinking of our faults,' said the little child. 'Oh! feed me—feed me with this food, or I shall die! And take this mantle, and wear it till you get one like that of the little girl who has gone on before you.'

"The child hesitated, for the garment was not pretty—to *her* taste: and, while she was still irresolute, she heard a voice behind her, saying, in most inviting accents—

" 'Nay, take *this* cloak; it is far prettier than the other; is much more easily put on; and is very comfortable indeed.'

"The child turned, and beheld a beautiful apparition, whose brightness dazzled her eyes, so that she could hardly see her; but the form was so radiant and enchanting, that she sprang into the arms extended towards her, saying—

" 'Oh! how beautiful you are. Give me your cloak!'

"The poor little child interposed—'Nay,' said the soft pleading voice; 'listen not to that woman. Her name is *Vanity*, and she will deceive you. Take *this* garment; it is not so pretty, but it will be more comfortable; and feed me—feed me, for I am starving here, and I become weaker every moment.'

"But the other, dazzled by the fascinating being at her side, sharply repulsed the poor little child, and, I think, would have killed her, had not she suddenly spread her wings, which had not till then been visible, and flown away.

"Then the pilgrim donned the garment of her new friend; and the latter, saying, 'I shall be with you on your journey, and shall direct your footsteps, though you will not see me'—immediately became invisible.

"After that, the little girl could not see clearly; she thought that dust had been blown into her eyes (and so it had; but her new friend had blown it there), and she rubbed them well; yet, do what she might, she could not see clearly; but she did not care, for everything looked much more beautiful than before.

"And so she travelled on very well for some days, meeting with no great misfortune, except that her blindness (which was increasing, though she did not know it) made her now and then fall into pits and ditches; but she escaped without any further injury than soiling her clothes, — which, by the way,

were now very different from the pure, white garments with which she had started; for they were soiled, and stained, and covered with mud, though the scarlet cloak she had so lately put on concealed this from *her* view; not so from that of *others* — for the cloak, grand as it seemed to the little girl, was so thin and flimsy, that every passer-by could see the rags and filth which it attempted to cover. And on her forehead was an ugly stain, which she had got when she fell into the first ditch. Yet she would have been very happy, had she not been now and then annoyed by a troublesome person whom she would have liked to stifle in the next bog; for he would come with a goad, and lash her well, and probe her with a sharp lance, somewhat in the form of a sting, which he carried with him; and this he did to try and turn her from the broad and easy road in which she was walking, into a narrow and straight, but somewhat rugged path, which did not look nearly so grand and inviting. But the little girl always resisted this person (who was named *Conscience*) and, therefore, he came less and less often, till at last his visits ceased altogether.

“And then one appeared (*Irreligion* by name) who made the little girl do all sorts of wicked things; and, shortly after, he introduced to her his son, *Infidelity*. Now, at first the little pilgrim was frightened, and shrank from the last-named person, for he was of somewhat forbidding aspect; but soon she grew accustomed to him, and she liked him all the better, that she fancied he was able to defend her from the assaults of that troublesome person, *Conscience*, and his disagreeable daughter, *Compunction*, and his grand-son, *Remorse*; so that she found *Infidelity* a very useful person. And thus she went on.

“She had started in the early spring, and it was now (though she did not know it) the beginning of autumn. Already she thought the air was growing cooler; and as she drew her scarlet mantle round her, she shuddered as she remarked that it was growing colder every day; and she trembled when she thought of the approaching autumn, and, still more, of the bitter frosts and pitiless blasts of winter. Then she felt a sort of half regret that she had not rather accepted the warm serviceable mantle which the little weak child had so kindly offered her.

“Besides this, she began to suspect her fascinating companion of being untruthful; nay — this suspicion was daily

strengthening into certainty; for whereas this false friend Vanity had repeatedly said to her—‘ You are beautiful ! more so than any one I know ! You have bright eyes and cheeks, and beautiful hair; and every one admires you !’ She had of late repeatedly heard a mysterious voice whisper to her —

“ ‘ It is not true ! it is not true ! Do not believe her ! She is your enemy ! Your only beauty lay in your pure unsullied brow, and spotless garments; and when they became soiled, your beauty vanished !’

“ At last the fascinating being, who had become less and less able to defend her from the attacks of such enemies as *Wounded Self-love*, *Outraged-pride*, and the like, one day received a terrible blow, which threw both her and the little wanderer (whom she dragged after her) into a deep and horrible pit, called *Destruction of cherished illusions*. The child wept sorely, as she bent over her fallen companion, and tried to restore her to life, but in vain, for her blood was rapidly ebbing away.

“ And now, by degrees, our traveller began to recover her sight; and gazing on the lifeless form of her lately supposed friend, but now recognised enemy, exclaimed, ‘ Ah ! what good friend killed her ?’

“ And then she heard again the mysterious voice, and saw its embodiment standing before her. At first, she shrunk back, and felt inclined to shut her eyes that she might not see her — for this personage was of stern and rather harsh aspect; but by dint of gazing on her features, she began to love her, and to feel that she could trust her.

“ ‘ Who are you ?’ said the child; ‘ I think I have seen you before; and yet, you are a stranger to me.’

“ ‘ I am *Truth* !’ replied the firm, decided, but harmonious voice. ‘ Without me, you can do nothing ! You knew me when you were a little, little child, before you started on the Great Pilgrimage. You loved me then; but you forsook me at the beginning of your career, and associated with companions whom I abhor; so I deserted you. But I see that the precepts inculcated in your childhood have been too strong for even such powerful enemies as you have encountered; so I will help you. Yet I warn you that no easy task lies before you; for you will have to fight with enemies who might have been easily overcome at the commencement of your journey, but who are now grown into giants, whose power is most

formidable: you have been told what weapons to employ. Now, say, have you courage to be guided by me?

“ ‘Yes,’ sighed the poor wayfarer. ‘Yes; for without you I must perish! I can trust to no one else, to draw me out of this pit!’

“ ‘Then, thus I begin!’ and she tore off the scarlet mantle.

“ At first, the pilgrim shuddered; but soon, feeling that it was for her good, she submitted. And then the stern counsellor said—

“ ‘Look in this mirror!’

“ She looked, and beheld—instead of the sweet, innocent child, with the fair, unsullied brow, and clad in white garments—a poor, wretched beggar, covered with mud from head to foot, and clothed with filthy rags; her mantle of self-confidence having long ago been worn out!

“ Overcome by the sad spectacle, she threw herself on the ground, in an agony of humiliation.

“ Then she felt a soft touch, and heard a sweet, soothing voice, and looking up, beheld the tiny child, holding out to her the before rejected mantle, saying:—

“ ‘It may be yours still—any time before you die! It is *never* too late!’

“ And the poor, helpless, despairing wanderer grasped the cloak, and put it on, drawing it more and more closely round her. And, as she did so, the little, tiny child grew, and grew, and became a stately and noble form; and, tearing off her wings, she threw them on the ground, saying,—

“ ‘They are now useless to me; for I shall never leave you more!’

“ Then, as the trembling sinner grasped the mantle, she felt a glow of comfort warm her poor, bursting heart; while, at the same time, an ugly figure, which had been crouching over her, and clutching at her heart, caught up the discarded wings of Repentance, and flew away.

“ ‘That was Despair,’ said her comforter. ‘He is my great enemy; and often, when I am longing to enter a human heart, he gets in before me, tells them that it is “too late” for me to enter, and they shut me out! But see—your enemies approach! be strong; and you may overcome them. Oh! do not yield—though they are of mighty force!’

"So saying, she drew the child out of the pit, and placed her on firm ground.

"And now her enemies advanced. First came *Pride*, with swollen cheeks and haughty brow.

"'What!' said he, 'will you meanly acknowledge yourself defeated? Will you let all the world see that you are a poor, miserable, abject worm? Will you now accept conditions which you refused long ago?'

"And, thus speaking, he aimed a sharp dart at the child's head. But Repentance had armed her with a mailed glove, called *Humility*, with which she caught the spear in her hand; and, piercing her assailant through the body, she answered,—

"'I *know* that I am but a poor, miserable worm! Why should not the world know it too? Ah! would that *I* had learnt it sooner!'

"At these words *Pride*, with a howl of anguish, gave up the ghost.

"Then came *Selfishness*, who said:

"'Ah, poor child! it is a weary task that you have undertaken! You will have to deny yourself all that you have hitherto cared for; and to lead a life of such self-denial as will be terrible to you!' And he aimed a sharp arrow at her.

"But Repentance placed on her head a helmet called *Self-denial*, and in her hand a sword called *Active Benevolence*; so she avoided the arrow, and cut her adversary in twain with the sharp sword. And, as he was dying, Truth prompted her to say—

"'You were the *first* of my enemies, and at the root of all the evils that have befallen me!'

"Next came *Infidelity*, the son of *Irreligion*.

"Now, this one was a great giant, and the child trembled as she saw him approach; for the weight of his footsteps shook the ground beneath her feet, and his poisonous breath tainted the air.

"But Repentance said, encouragingly,—

"'Fight well! Your only chance lies in overcoming him. Your other victories will have been useless, if you are defeated here!'

"And Truth added,—

"'Fear him not; he is full of lies!'

"Now the monster advanced with a fearful aspect; the air

became chilled by his terrible breath, and it had grown so dark (no wonder, for he stood between her and the sun, and his great shadow extended for leagues!) that the poor child groped about in uncertainty. She could no longer see her good friend, Truth; but she felt that Repentance had not left her.

"And now the giant, poising his arm on high, launched a javelin at the head of the child; and the helmet, Self-denial, fell to the ground!

"'Ho! ho!' laughed the monster—'all the fine qualities in the world give way before *me*! There is but *one* weapon that can resist me; and you haven't that about you, I reckon!'

"So saying, he darted another blow, which dashed from her the sword, Benevolence, and tore off part of the mailed glove, Humility.

"Then the child wept bitterly, and cried,—

"'Oh, Truth, Truth! where are you? Help me!'

"But it was so dark that she could not see Truth!

"The monster uttered a horrible roar when he heard the name of Truth, who was a formidable enemy of his. Sometimes, when with those who did not know him, he would try to pass himself off as Truth; but here he knew it would be impossible; since the little girl knew him by his right name. So he said,—

"'Ah! little one—you think Truth can help you; and so she could! But you don't know where to find her; and so, I shall have you, fast enough!'

"At this moment the child heard some feeble voices saying, 'We will help you! We will conquer him! Little girl—take refuge behind us!'

"And some thin, airy-looking beings placed themselves before her; and the child, in her helplessness, had recourse to their aid. They were called *Theological Treatises*.

"'Fool!' said the Demon—'think you that *they* can save you? *Thus* do I treat them!'

"And, seizing them in his grasp, he whirled them aloft in the air; and they flew off into space.

"And now he stretched out his horrid arms to clasp the child in his embrace, and to carry her away with him to his castle, where dwelt his wife, *Hopeless Despair*, who was the worst of all her family. But, first, he tried to wrest from her the garb of Repentance; only, she held it so firmly round her that he could not take it away. He bent over her, as an

eagle swoops upon its prey; and the child, with a shudder, closed her eyes, and gave herself up for lost,—when, just at that moment, she heard a low, indistinct voice—sweet, but most sad!—which sounded afar off, and yet, seemed very near; and it said to her—

“ ‘Little girl! little girl! have you forgotten the sword which was given you when you started on your journey?’ ”

“ A thrill of ecstasy shot through her frame; for she recognised the voice of a dear friend—a friend to whom she had been most unfaithful!—*the Memory of Early Days*—and she knew that she was saved! ”

“ Drawing the sword, *Prayer*, from its sheath, she defended herself from the assaults of the enemy; but still she could not overcome him—only she felt, every moment, stronger and stronger; and thus she fought on bravely. At first, from not being accustomed to it, she handled the sword rather awkwardly—the more so, as it was somewhat rusty from want of use; but, the longer she fought, the more expert she became. ”

“ The giant grumbled to himself—‘ What’s put it into her head, I wonder, to use that sword? I can’t harm her while she has *that* in her hand! Perhaps she will grow tired, and drop it! At all events, she can’t hurt me, till she discover where Truth has hidden herself! ’ ”

“ So the giant fought on; and the little girl still continued to use her sword. ”

“ At length, the same dear friend who had last spoken to her, said—‘ Little girl! little girl! have you forgotten? The Book! ’ ”

“ And the child uttered a scream of joy, as she drew it forth from the bag which the Good Genius had hung round her neck at starting. ”

“ As she held it up before the giant, the sight made him howl with anguish and despair; and he aimed at it a shower of darts, but they were all turned aside by the wind. And the Book, which the little girl had placed at her feet, grew, and grew, till, at length, the clasps burst open, and out flew Truth, who, at the first appearance of Infidelity had hidden herself in the Word of God—not because she feared the Giant, but because she knew that those who were sincerely desirous of finding her would seek her there! ”

“ And now the little girl’s eyes were fully opened; and she

saw that Truth was radiantly lovely, and that her garment of Righteousness was more dazzling than the sun's rays.

"Now, when the Giant saw this great and majestic figure, with its clear, open brow, regarding him severely, as it raised its powerful right arm to crush him to the earth, he fled, howling with rage and despair; but, as he fled, Truth cast a bolt after him, called *Prophecy fulfilled*, which crippled him for a long while.

" 'This giant,' said the deliverer, turning to the child, 'can never again molest you, now that you know where *I* am always to be found. Had you used your Book and your Sword, in making your pilgrimage, you would not have had so many falls, nor would you have been assailed by this great enemy at the last! And now consult your tablet, and see *who* have been your disguised companions for so long a time!

"The child complied, conscience-stricken—for she knew that she had neglected to profit by the tablet; and, as she did so she started back in horror! for she saw that the beautiful creatures whom she had loved and caressed, were so many Demons, of frightful and distorted aspect, clothed in hideous garments!

"There stalked *Selfishness*—shivering with cold, and drawing his filthy rags around him; and before him, flying in dismay, were *Goodwill*, *Charity*, *Benevolence*, *Comfort*, *Love of Mankind*, and, finally, *Happiness*!

"Then *Discontent* walked sullenly by, arm-in-arm with *Envy*, who clasped to her breast a lean and wretched infant, called *Malice*; while a snarling idiot called *Ill-Will* clung to his mother's garments.

"Next came *Hatred*,—fiercely gnashing his teeth, rushing along madly, and dealing his blows right and left.

"*Despair* followed—gaunt and haggard—with clenched hands and down-bent eyes.

"And then came *Vanity*, feebly groping her way—for she was blind and very helpless. Her miserable rags hardly concealed her wretched, skeleton limbs; she had a frightful mouth; and she kept gnashing her long, sharp teeth, and screaming, 'More! More! More Flattery! More Flattery! or I shall starve!'

" 'Oh! how frightful!' said the child; and she tried to erase them from the tablet, but could not.

" 'Let them remain there,' said Truth, 'and so retain the

fruits of Experience! Now that you have seen those Demons in their *true* forms, you need not fear them; and with Prayer, and the Word of God, you will conquer all things! But now, look in this glass!

"And she drew forth a small, clear mirror, and held it before her. Its name was, *Years and Tribulations*.

"The child started. Could *that* be the young and joyous creature who had, only the other day, begun that long, weary journey?

"She saw before her an aged, care-worn mortal! Her hair was silvery white; and deep lines were furrowed in her sad thoughtful face. Her form was bent—no less with age, than trouble; and she leant on a staff, called, *God's Mercy*. She was going down a steep and rugged hill, and was very near the bottom. Repentance walked before her; and Truth, by her side.

"Her friend again spoke.

"'Child of Earth, look around you, and tell me what is the season.'

"The wanderer looked, and lo! it had been early Spring when she left the wood; Summer had passed, but she had not heeded it; Autumn, too, but she recked not; and now it was Winter, and the trees were bare, and the ground was covered with snow, and the wind howled mournfully around her!

"'Child, what golden fruit hast thou gathered on thy way?' asked Truth, in stern and solemn accents. 'Thou hast made a long journey, and a fertile land was before thee! What hast thou to show at the close of this thy journey through life? 'Tis now Winter, and thou mayest travel no more, for thy foot is weary, thy hand is weak, thy sight faileth thee!'

And the poor wanderer, with breaking heart, fell upon her knees; and she sobbed forth—

"'Alas! alas! I am an unprofitable servant!'

"Then Truth spoke:

"'Take unto thee thy friend Repentance; she will come at thy call—it is never too late! Take her—clasp her to thy heart—let her not escape! She will save thee!'

"And the poor penitent did so; and Repentance guided her into the narrow, rugged path which led to Salvation. And as she sped swiftly and hopefully down the hill, she strained her loved friend more closely to her heart.

"Now they were at the bottom of the descent, and the poor

wanderer suddenly felt that she could go no further. Her limbs gave way under her; her heart beat with difficulty; a mist swam before her eyes; her breath came thick and fast! But still she clung to her gentle friend.

" 'Cling to this also,' said the latter.

"The wanderer looked up, and found that she was at the foot of a cross, on which hung a crown of thorns.

" 'Saved! saved!' she murmured, in dying accents.

"Hush!—step gently—speak low! Her toils are ended. She sleeps peacefully at the foot of the Cross, led thither by Repentance!"

As I concluded, my mother, whose eyes were fixed on me very earnestly, said—

"That is a beautiful story, Eleanor. Do you understand it?"

"Yes, Mamma; for I had read it before, and thought about it; and the little beautiful child, Innocence, reminded me of Edie."

"God forbid!" was my mother's hasty rejoinder, as she caught her darling in her arms, and pressed her fondly to her heart.

"Well, Edie," I asked, "was the story pretty?"

"Yes, very pretty; but—" (glancing doubtfully at the other end of the room, which was in darkness), "but was the giant *real*? Did he ever live? Only *pretend*, was it?"

"Of course, darling, it was only pretend. So now let us have a good romp before we go to bed."





Oh! enviable early days,
When dancing thoughtless pleasure's maze,
To care, to guilt unknown!
How ill exchanged for riper times,
To feel the follies, or the crimes,
Of others, or my own:
Ye tiny elves, that, guiltless, sport,
Like linnets in the bush,
Ye little know the ills ye court,
When manhood is your wish!
The losses, the crosses,
That *active men* engage,
The fears all, the tears all,
Of dim declining age! — BURNS.

Yes, that winter was very pleasant. I used to make snow castles with Oscar, and we used to slide, and skate, and amuse ourselves in many ways; and when the weather did not permit me to go out, I had such nice books and toys, that my time flew rapidly. Then I was passionately fond of music, and whenever I could get a piano to myself, I would sit down to it, and play, by ear, simple touching airs, that often brought tears into my eyes. Every Thursday afternoon I accompanied Aunt Mary to the cottages of the poor, when my Aunt heard their humble tales, and relieved their wants to the best of her power, by bestowing either alms, sympathy, or advice.

Aunt Mary *loved* the poor. She often said to me: "Nelly, they are so helpless!" And thus, too, in the majesty of His power and might, thought our Great Redeemer—the glorious personification of all intellect and wisdom. Oh! the poor are *very* helpless! Why should we crush them? Why keep them at so great a distance from ourselves? Why not rather endeavour to draw them nearer to us—to inspire them with

confidence and affection? They loved Aunt Mary, and looked upon her as little less than an angel. (Was *that* surprising?) She was so patient, so forbearing with them. She would listen to all their little querulous complaints as if they had been her children. She was ever making excuses for them. Were they sick, she would herself take and administer to them the medicine that was to cure them. Were they suffering from poverty, she would liberally, yet judiciously, furnish them with money, and that, too, probably at some sacrifice to herself. Were they labouring under some mental distress, she would enter into it with the most intense sympathy, and then console to the utmost of her power.

It was now, as I said, the depth of winter, and intensely cold, but I had become inured to it, and, well wrapt up, continued my daily walks and slides and construction of snow houses with Oscar, who was now my inseparable companion. Sometimes we would climb a hill, to see the glorious sun go down over fields of snow; another day we would visit the cliff, and watch the mad waves as they broke wildly over the rocks beneath. Sometimes he would gather scarlet and white berries, and string them in a chain for me to wear. I was very fond of Oscar, for he was unlike other boys of his age. He could be, when he chose, as gentle as a woman, and had a heart tenderly alive to human suffering; nevertheless, he had been terribly indulged by his parents, and had never learnt that most necessary and Christian duty—self-denial. He could *not* deny himself anything that he wished for, even though it could only be procured at the expense of comfort or happiness to others: whatever he desired he *must* have. Oscar, alas! had no idea of religion, which he called “Cant”; and once, when I said something to him which seemed to verge on the subject, he abruptly exclaimed—

“My darling little Nelly—don’t *you* be a humbug! You are too pretty to be intended for a nasty old maid, which you *will* be if you take to cant and humbug!”

And I had felt very much hurt—so much so, that I had, since then, carefully avoided the subject.

And now, as I said, it was the middle of winter, and we enjoyed ourselves unutterably; for the Herberts (so Oscar willed it—and his will was law) gave a juvenile party; and their example was followed by others; so that we were very gay.

Well do I remember a conversation that I had with Oscar at the first of these parties. Making a rush towards me, and marching me off, he said:—

"Nelly, I want you to be with *me* all the evening, and not to dance with any one else; for I made mamma give this party for nothing in the world besides. You won't like any of the boys—and I shan't like any of the girls—they are all ugly and awkward except you! Oh, Nelly, how pretty you are!"

"Am I? I'm very glad of it, for it's nice to be pretty—it makes people like one. But I think it's only your fancy, Oscar, because you love me: we always think people that we love quite beautiful, whether they are so or not. Edith thinks nurse pretty, though she really is not."

"O bother! I don't believe in thinking people good-looking because one likes them; at all events *I* don't. I always like good-looking people, whether they are good or not. I like them *because* they are good-looking; and I liked you from the first minute I saw you, just because I thought you the prettiest little thing I had ever seen. I love *all* that is beautiful; fine horses, and furniture, and houses, and dogs, and birds, and flowers, and dress, and scenery, and—there!—I do believe I should love the Devil himself, if he were handsome—which, of course, he is n't!"

"Oh, Oscar, Oscar! how can you be so wicked! (the tears were in my eyes). Promise me never to say that again, or I will not love you, nor let you be my brother any more."

"I'll promise anything in the world, if you won't look so miserable. I did n't mean it, Nelly."

"Oh! but it is very wrong to say such things, even in fun, Oscar, dear! But don't you think Edie pretty?"

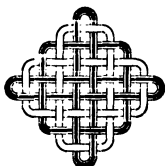
"Yes; I could kiss her to death, and eat her up. I never saw such a pretty baby; but she is *only* a baby. If she were older I don't know whether I should not think her as pretty as even *you*. But come—if you've had enough tea—and let us go to the dancing room."

There was, that evening, a magnificent Christmas-tree. What anxiety and excitement were depicted on the little, eager faces, as they drew their prizes! Amongst other things there fell to Oscar's share a beautifully carved little mother-of-pearl fruit-knife, which he most gallantly presented to me.

"But it will cut love, Oscar. I *must* give you a halfpenny,

or you will be finding out some other little girl for your sister; and I should n't like that."

But Oscar declared, that, until he met some one prettier than Nelly, nothing could ever divide him from her. Nevertheless, I insisted on presenting him with a silver penny, which I had treasured for some time; and he said that he would bore a hole in it, and string it on a blue ribbon, and wear it all his life, for my sake. Poor Oscar! he little thought!——





XIX

Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what
a day may bring forth — PROVERBS xxvii. 3.

THE winter was passing away rapidly. Oscar had induced his parents to let him remain at home, with a tutor, for another year, so that he and I were still inseparable companions; and, what with him, Aunt Mary, and dear little Edie, I should have been perfectly happy, but for my mother's aversion, which was steady and unabated; nothing that I could do availed, in the least, to soften her. And yet she was more indulgent to me than ever, and nothing that I wished for was denied me; it seemed as if she were anxious thus to compensate for withholding her affection — the only gift which would have inspired me with real pleasure.

And thus the winter passed; and spring had come, with its budding trees and flowers, and light, fresh breezes. And now occurred an epoch in my life — an event that materially affected my destiny.

It was a lovely day. The sun shone, with silvery lustre, on brook and lake, and tinted with his bright and cheering, yet not too ardent, rays every tree and flower. Nature was very beautiful that day, as I thought, when, wrapping a shawl around me (for the air, so pure and invigorating, was yet rather chilly) I sauntered forth. It was not my usual play-hour; for my mother, remarking the fineness of the day — the first *very* fine one since the winter — had sent to the school-room to excuse my lessons; so, of course, Oscar was not in the grounds to meet me, therefore I went out alone. Mrs. Goodrich had that day been allowed to go home; so Edith was

sent out with the under-nurse, an inexperienced, and rather giddy, young girl. As she left the house, my mother, pinning a warm, scarlet shawl over Edith's chest, said,—

“Now go, my darling, and I will follow you, almost directly; it is a pity for you to lose any of this delicious air.” And Edith had gone.

I just ran up stairs for a book to take with me, thinking to play with Edith for a little while, till my mother joined her; but I was so long in finding it, that she had started before I set out: so I thought I would just follow in the distance, for I liked to watch my dear little sister, even if I could not be with her.

But I sought her vainly in the grounds; so, thinking she might be in the field, I climbed a high bank, which, supported by a wall with a dry ditch at the bottom, overlooked the field. As I did so, a little girl who was below the wall, the other side, exclaimed, in terrified accents,—

“Miss, miss, please let me get up here; there's a big, bad bull, that's broke loose; and the men and dogs are after him!”

All the while she had with difficulty been climbing up, and now stood beside me.

Great Heaven! and there, half way across the field, which was large, was my little sister, and the nurse not with her! She was in the next field, exchanging vows of affection with a clod-pole of the village; and the little child, tempted by some large daisies, had crept away, unperceived, through a half-open gate.

I screamed—I shouted—but in vain; my little sister was too much engaged to hear me. And now my heart all but stood still; for there was a roar, and a shouting of men's voices in the distance, and the bull broke through the opposite hedge, and then stood still, as if irresolute.

I thought not of the danger; I only saw my little darling in the middle of the field—alone, and helpless; and, with one bound, I leaped from the wall, cleared the dry ditch, and the hedge beyond it, and then, running as though I had wings to my feet, made for the spot where my darling sat, wrapped in her scarlet shawl. She, warned by my screams, which I had renewed, had become aware of her peril, and was now running towards me, as fast as she could; but her poor little feet seemed paralysed, and she was crying in an agony of terror.

“I'm coming, Edie! Don't cry! I'll save you! Run,

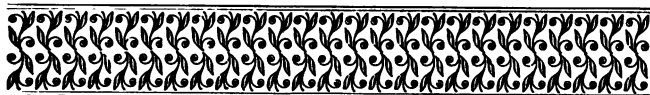
Edie, run!" I shouted; for the bull had at last caught sight of the scarlet shawl, and after stamping on the ground, and tossing his head, had taken a few steps in advance, and then quickened his pace to a trot, which would in a few moments become a gallop.

But little Edie had met me nearly half-way from the bank, and I had seized her, and partly dragging, partly carrying her, fled with all the speed I could, having first torn the shawl from the child's neck, and thrown it on the ground. This act, by delaying the bull for a moment, probably saved us; for we were afterwards told that the animal paused, stamped on it, and then tossed it in the air, as he broke into a gallop, and then came after us in good earnest.

I could hear the thundering tramp of his hoofs, as he approached nearer and nearer, mingled with the shouts of his pursuers, who saw our danger, and tried to divert the wrath of the fierce animal. I saw that I had almost reached the bank; but my exertions had been so fearful, that my strength was failing me. A death-like sickness stole over me — a mist swam before my eyes. I was within a few steps of the hedge below the wall. My limbs tottered — my sight failed — my very breath seemed gone. With one mighty effort I threw my burden forward over the low hedge. She was safe!

Then there was a singing in my ears, and a great darkness before me, and a frightful roar, mingled with a scream from a voice that I seemed to know:—they both sounded afar off, and like a dream. And I felt a shock — but not much, for I was nearly unconscious — and it was over!





Secret are the ways of Heaven,
Yet to some great aim they tend;
Often some affliction given
Proves a blessing in the end:
Let no vain impatient gesture
Question the diviner Will,
But in Faith's immortal vesture
Wait thy mission, and be still.—SWAIN.

WITH darkness around me, with a sense of weariness and pain unutterable, and with a heavy sigh, I awoke to consciousness. I felt too weary — too much overcome by a weight of misery and oppression — for speech. I only gave one sigh; and, as I did so, I felt the pressure of a hand in which mine was clasped, while a voice tremblingly uttered the heartfelt words, “Thank God!”

Though that voice sounded like my mother's, I was too weak and ill to feel astonished. I closed my eyes, and slept.

When I again awoke, it was with a feeling of refreshment and comfort: and I was able to falter out the words, “Where am I?” And my mother's voice, low, sweet, gentle, and half-broken with sobs, answered me, as she pressed her kisses on my cheek:—

“Here — with your mother — my own Nelly! my darling!”

Then I burst into an incontrollable fit of passionate weeping; and that night there was a return of the delirium under which I had been labouring; and again my life was despaired of.

When I woke to renewed consciousness, my dear Aunt Mary was bending over me, and her soothing accents fell upon my ear:—

"Keep quiet, dear Nelly. You have been ill; and if you excite yourself you will be worse."

I made a movement to draw her arm round my neck, and again fell asleep.

For some days, whenever I felt inclined to speak, her hand was laid upon my lips; but at last I felt so much stronger, that I *would* speak, and she could not prevent it.

"Aunt, I must know *one* thing, and then I will be quiet. I've had a horrid dream, about a bull and Edith. It's *only* a dream, I know; but let me see Edith."

"Yes, darling, you shall." And she rang the bell.

"And I had another dream—oh! *such* a dream!—but that could n't be true either—about mamma—"

There was a movement of the bed-curtains, and my mother was beside me.

"Now, Gertrude," said my aunt, in a more peremptory tone than I had ever heard her assume, "you shall not stay in this room, unless you have more self-control. Remember your promise!"

And my mother, sighing heavily, resumed her seat; but not before I had noticed the sad, care-worn face, full of mournful anxiety.

Edith entered, and was placed on the bed beside me. Throwing her little arms round my neck, she pressed her cheek to mine, and I felt happy.

"Oh, Nelly! make haste and get well soon; I'm so dull without you. They said you were going to die; and I've been crying, and mamma, too! Don't die, Nelly! Don't leave Edie, that you saved from that dreadful bull!"

And she clasped her arms still more tightly round me, as if she felt that she could thus keep me with her.

"Then it was *real*, and not a dream?" I asked in feeble accents, as the whole scene recurred to me in all its horror.

"Yes, Nelly—darling Nelly! You threw me over the little hedge, and mamma jumped down to me. And the horrid bull had caught you, and thrown you in the air, and would have killed you; but two dogs came up, and then he stuck his horns into them, and threw them up, too. And then a great many men came running, and threw a rope round the bull, and got him on the ground, and took him away. But before that, mamma had put me up on the bank; and then she got through the hedge, and caught you up: it was a wonder the

bull didn't kill *her*,—but he was hurting the dogs. And mamma carried you in her arms into the house, and I ran after. And mamma cried—oh! she *did* cry so!—and I cried, too, and Aunt Mary; and they said you were going to die—and then mamma cried worse than before. Oh, Nelly! dear, darling Nelly! you won't die?"

I did not answer; for the tears were chasing each other down my cheeks; and soon after, my sister, once more embracing me, was taken away.

From that day I continued, though very slowly, to recover, constantly attended by my mother and aunt. The former was very quiet, and moved about the room with her gentle noiseless step, and mournful face. Now and then she would place her cool soft hand on my forehead, or hold my wrist while she anxiously counted my pulse; and the good old doctor vainly endeavoured to cheer her by prognostications of my speedy recovery.

One day my aunt had gone into another room to take a little rest, for she was worn out with so much watching; so that I was alone with my mother, whose large earnest eyes were bent anxiously upon me.

"What ails you, Nelly?" she said at length, perceiving that my eyes were full of tears.

"Nothing, Mamma."

"But why do you cry? Shall I bring Aunt Mary, or Edie?"

"No, Mamma—no."

And then there was a long silence.

"What are you thinking of, Nelly?"

I did not answer.

"Tell me, my child."

My voice trembled. "I was thinking that I should like to die now!"

"Why, Nelly, dear?"

"Because," I answered, in broken accents, "I am so happy!"

"But you will be happy when you get well—far happier than now; for you will be out of pain."

"Ah! but then you will change again, Mamma! and you will be cold to me, as you were before!"

She gently put her arms round me, and, tenderly kissing me, replied—

"I shall *never* change to you, Nelly! I never knew nor understood you before; and if I did not love you then as I do now, it was from no fault of *yours*, my poor little darling; but I will tell you about that another time — when you are older. Nelly — will you believe what I am going to say?"

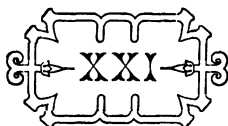
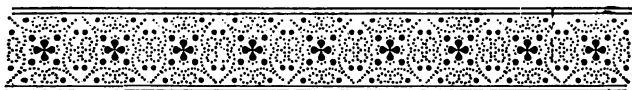
"Yes, Mamma."

"I love you now, more dearly than you can imagine; henceforth I shall not regard you as a step-child, but as my own — my eldest daughter. Will you try to feel that I am your own mamma?"

For all answer I clung round her neck, in a long, lingering embrace.

That night, when I slept, with my head pillowed on her shoulder, I had found, for the first time, a mother's love!





Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches: feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.

PROVERBS XXX. 8, 9.

AND now my recovery was much more rapid; and two months from the date of my encounter with the bull, I was brought down into the cheerful parlour and laid on the couch. My mother's affection was daily increasing, and her care for me unremitting. In my delirium I had raved about her, and my Aunt, and Edie. I had addressed the two latter in terms of confiding endearment; but I had uttered lamentations over my mother's coldness, and agonised supplications for her affection; and she had thus learnt, with bitter self-reproach, how she had for years obscured the sunshine of my young life.

It was nearly summer now; and my couch was drawn to the window, that I might inhale the pure air. I was very happy; for my mother, and aunt, and Edie, were with me; and Oscar, who had been unremitting in his enquiries, was to be allowed to see me. When he came, he started back.

"Oh! poor dear Nelly! how ill you look! And nearly all your beautiful hair gone! But the *eyes* are the same still — so you are the same Nelly after all!"

And he tenderly stooped down to kiss me. That evening, Edith was summoned out of the room, and, returning covered with blushes, drew from under a cloth something she was carrying. It was a bird-cage, containing a beautiful little bullfinch.

"Look, Nelly! isn't it a darling? Will you have it? for I killed your little bird — I'm *so* sorry!"

K

"My dear little sister, you must forget all about that!"

"Yes, so I did; but Mamma did n't, and that's why she bought this little dear bird. Oh! it cost *so* much! several *golden* shillings (guineas she meant), and it's for you; and it's *such* a darling, for it will perch on your finger, and whistle beautiful tunes!"

"My dear, *own* Mamma!" I exclaimed, with a grateful look. "How good you are!"

But each day afforded some fresh proof of my mother's anxiety to atone for the past, the remembrance of which she evidently could not dispel. Yielding, with her characteristic impetuosity, to every impulse of her warm, undisciplined heart, she placed no bounds to her affection for me. And now, again, my dear Aunt Mary stood my friend, by struggling firmly against the evil consequences which she feared would result from my mother's boundless indulgence; for my temper and disposition were at this time in far greater danger than before.

"Nelly," she said to me one day, "you are now about to be tried by *prosperity*; believe me, darling, it is far more trying to the heart than adversity. For when we are happy and prosperous, we are so absorbed and led away by that happiness, that we are too apt to think it all-sufficient, and forget to ask God for anything more; but when we are in trouble, we turn to God for assistance—that is, unless we are *very* much hardened—just as a child, when some great trouble has befallen it, will run to its parents for help. But read what your friend, Robert Hall, says about it—read it well, and attentively; and oh! my darling, let me not find that all my anxiety on your behalf has been in vain!"

"No, Aunt; and if it's only for *that*, I will try to do as you wish me. I shall never forget that *you* were good to me when I had no friend in the world. Oh! I will indeed strive to be all you wish!"

How happy we were now—we four! What delicious drives and walks we had together! And what pleasant times within-doors, when, as I became well enough to leave the couch, I used to sit, with a story-book in my lap, on a low stool at my mother's feet, my head resting against her knee. Now and then her hand would be laid caressingly on my head; or she would bend down, and bestow on me a long, loving kiss.

"Ah! Nelly, darling," she said, one day, when she had been

passing her fingers through my hair, "I wish we could have saved some of those beautiful curls!—but that naughty, ill-natured, old doctor *would* have them off. I would not consent to your being made an absolute *fright*, so I insisted on their leaving a little of it; but it is, indeed, a little! I shall not be satisfied till it comes again; and that will not be for months and months—till when, you must wear those odious caps!"

I saw much of Oscar; for my mother, for my sake, had grown very fond of him, and allowed him to come in at all times. He made his appearance every day at twelve o'clock, in order to draw me round the garden in my little, low carriage; for I was not strong enough to walk. Oscar could be, when he liked, as gentle as a woman; and his tender care of me, in my helplessness, was most touching. He used, himself, to carry me from the couch, place me in the little carriage, and wrap me up in soft shawls, with more than a woman's care. I was very chilly; for though it was now summer, my illness, and the quantity of blood I had been compelled to lose, had reduced me to a skeleton, and every breath of wind made me shudder as if it were still winter. Then Oscar would stop, come to my side, fold the shawls more closely round me, and with anxious, lingering affection, remain holding my hand, and gazing sorrowfully in my face.

And now, it was the middle of summer, and I was well enough to take short walks—sometimes with Oscar alone, sometimes with my mother and aunt, and darling little Edith. One day my mother drew me to the window—

"Come, darling—I have something to shew you!"

I obeyed, and, looking out, saw the groom, holding by its bridle a most beautiful black pony.

"That is for you, Nelly, when you are well enough to learn to ride."

"Oh, mamma! is it *really*? What a darling! And I *should* so like to be able to ride, like Blanche and Florence Elliot;—and this pony is much prettier than either of theirs! Is it *really* for me? Dear mamma, how can you be so good to me!"

And my eyes filled with tears of surprise and joy.

As soon as I was well enough I mounted my pony; and the sensation was so new, and delightful, that, for some days, I could think of nothing else. At first, a groom rode by my

side; but my mamma promised that Oscar should be my companion, as soon as John pronounced it safe.

My mother had provided me with a beautiful little habit, and with a black velvet hat of the Spanish shape, with one ostrich plume floating back over it; and when Oscar saw me in this costume for the first time, he was in such raptures at my appearance, that, despite my remembrance of Innocence and the scarlet cloak, I could not help feeling very much pleased. At last I was allowed to ride with Oscar. Ah! those delightful rides! How many moments has their memory since embittered! Those were pure and happy days—the brightest in all my life—too pure and bright, to last!

About this time I first saw a person who exercised a powerful influence (I may not say, an *unfortunate* one—since it was the will of God) over all our destinies; this was, my mother's half-brother, Robert. Well do I remember the first evening Uncle Rob made his appearance. We were sitting at the tea-table, when, without being announced, he suddenly entered, rushed towards my mother, and, with an exclamation, "Here I am again, Puss!" overwhelmed her with kisses. My mother was delighted to see him, for she cherished the warmest affection for this erratic being, who was her only living relation. He had been in India for the last few years—making his fortune, it was said; however, as he came back without a farthing, the truth of the supposition was highly problematical. He looked about thirty, and had a quick, bright eye.

"Well, Gert, I had a hankering after England that I could *not* resist; so I left India (just as I was on the point of getting rich) and came back to my dear old England, and my own darling little Gert! Can you put me up for a night? I shall look out for lodgings to-morrow."

"Lodgings? Oh, Rob! how can you talk so oddly!—*this* is your home, as long as you will stay in it. Are you not my only living relation? Did we not play together in the dear old time, when we were children?"

"Well, Gert, I would rather be here with you; and yet I don't exactly like the idea of it."

Thereupon, my mother entered into an argument which, of course, convinced Mr. Robert Willoughby of the utter impossibility of his living elsewhere (I suspect the argument was so much rhetoric thrown away, and that Uncle Rob had not entertained the slightest intention of leaving). When the

discussion was ended, my uncle turned to us, duly praised and admired us, and then proposed a game at "puss in the corner," to which we acceded instantaneously; and he thus managed to ingratiate himself in our good opinion. But he was really fond of children; and we felt it instinctively, and liked him. My mother, at his request, allotted him a small suite of rooms at the top of the house; and there he generally remained all day, until the evening, when he came down to tea, looking very clean, very well dressed, and very smiling, and good-tempered.

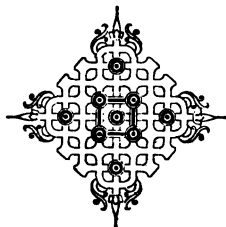
Every one liked Uncle Rob; but my mother, who had been his early playmate, perfectly adored him, and he exercised unbounded influence over her. He and Aunt Mary were *not* very good friends; I often heard my aunt warn my mother against him, but I could not understand her meaning. She would say, "Well, Gertrude, I have warned you, and can do no more"; or, "Gertrude, *do* be prudent!" or, "Think of the injury you may do your children!" My aunt seemed very anxious, indeed, about something or other connected with Uncle Rob; but what it was, I could not understand: I knew, to my cost, later!

Mr. Percival now visited much at Rocklands; and I had persuaded my mother to go to his church. We were always glad when he came; for he was very kind to us children, and would frequently take us for a walk with him, and would tell us amusing stories, and make us laugh; and sometimes he would take us into the little rectory, where his old house-keeper always had something pretty to shew us — either a new kitten, or puppy, or a young brood of chickens, or ducks: then we were sure to return home laden with nice fruit, or cakes. Yes; decidedly, we liked Mr. Percival very much.

Thus time flew on, and autumn had again set in. My mother had begun to take a great interest in my education, and had engaged a French governess for me, and began to talk of a German one too (I sighed when I heard of it!) She took me, twice a week, to the dancing academy at B——; and a first-rate drawing and Italian master attended me at Rocklands. She was seeking a music-master; but could not find one who could play so well as Aunt Mary. All this learning was a sad trial to me; but it seemed to give my mother so much pleasure, that I bore it patiently, and profited by the instruction that was crammed into my unwilling little head.

And the seasons went their rounds — my mother petting, and trying her best to spoil me; Mr. Percival watching, and advising, and befriending me; Oscar bestowing all his affection on me, and exacting, not only affection, but implicit submission, in return; little darling Edith bewitching me into forgetfulness of the stern duty that I owed to her youth and helplessness; and Aunt Mary, loving, advising, warning, with never-dying zeal for my soul's welfare.

Years rolled on. The seed was sown. Seed-time was over. The harvest was to come.





XXII

'Twas a new feeling — something more
Than we had dared to own before.

MOORE.

Six years have passed; and I am no longer little Nelly, but a quiet, demure, young lady of sixteen. No more do I enact the distressed Princess in the sweet little bay. I am "coming out," rather against the wish of my aunt, who would have given me two years' reprieve, for the sake of strengthening my character, cultivating my mind, and adding yet more to my stock of health. But my mother would not hear of it; she was so proud of me, that she could not bear any longer to immure my fancied perfections in the retirement of the country. I was still, for the next two years, to devote a great part of the day to study; but "come out," I must, and should! On that point she was determined. No expense had been spared on my education; masters in every possible branch had, with great trouble, been procured for me; besides which, there were Edith's English governess (but I was long passed *her* instruction), and a German, and a French one. An Italian master still came twice a week. Fortunately, the immense size of the house prevented our suffering any annoyance from this avalanche of education; my father's former room having been converted into a study for me, and the three governesses sitting in the school-room, and never appearing below; so that, except when I was at my lessons, or when, for the sake of keeping up my knowledge of their languages, I walked out with one or other of them, we never saw them. In the summer I rose early, and took a run before breakfast — generally, as of old, to the dear little bay; after breakfast, I devoted two

hours to the piano and singing, and another hour to painting. By that time it was twelve o'clock, when I either rode or walked till two (my black pony had been transferred to Edith; and I had now a splendid bay mare, which was the admiration of the whole county).

At two we dined (unless we had company), after which, I studied until five, when we had tea, and my work was ended. We then either drove or walked, generally accompanied by Uncle Rob and Aunt Mary, and sometimes by Mr. Percival. Oscar was going into the army, to the great sorrow of his mother, who did her best to dissuade him, but without success; he *would* have his own way. He was now in town, but was on his road home. Oscar was now a fine, tall, handsome fellow of twenty; and he looked some three or four years older. And now, to continue my narrative.

It was a delightful summer evening; and we all sat in the balcony outside the drawing-room window. We were going for a walk; but a universal laziness had seized upon us, and we still lingered there; I, engaged in making a frock for Edith's doll, which my little sister was holding in her lap, ready to be "fitted"; my mother "making believe" to work at a piece of embroidery (the ancient, interminable one was finished, and this was another); my aunt, hemming, some frills pertaining to the dress of the aforesaid doll; and Uncle Rob, engaged in his usual avocation of talking nonsense. So there we all sat enjoying ourselves — now and then pausing from our work to gaze dreamily on the enchanting scene below, bathed as it was in the golden rays of the declining sun, as they fell, with softened splendour, on mossy slope and upland, on rich masses of foliage, and on little glimpses of the shining river, which peeped forth, here and there, from among the trees. It was an evening to be very happy — or very very miserable.

Reader, have you never remarked how greatly the sight of a beautiful landscape tends to increase the intensity of either sorrow or joy? I suppose it is because it heightens the imaginative powers — stimulates them, so to speak. If I were doomed to pass through one of those heavy, crushing sorrows, the thought of which I could not banish, I would rather have to bear it in a large town, among the busy, matter-of-fact, every-day world, than in the lovely country. In the latter we are better able to *nurse* our grief; and the sorrow, if borne in

the spirit of submission to Him who sends it, may, it is true, become blessed; but how often do we, under such circumstances, allow our imaginations to become excited, whilst mourning in solitude, and before the sweet sad face of nature, until what was a real sorrow degenerates into a morbid sensibility, which is at last indulged on every occasion? No; if I must shake off some heavy grief, give me the hum and turmoil of the busy, unsympathising crowd — the noise of traffic — the crowded street — the tall, cold, stately houses of a town. I may be mistaken; but it seems to me, that, under such circumstances, the imagination must become deadened much sooner than when we yield to the longing which we all, at such a time, have for quiet and seclusion from our fellow-creatures.

Uncle Rob was the only one of the party who did not seem in the least touched by the lovely prospect, and the calm, holy evening-time; Uncle Rob (trust him!) never allowed *his* imagination to be unduly excited by a beautiful scene. The bright sun, and the splendid trees, and the mossy sward — the gay flowers, the blue sky, and the sweet song of the birds — were “all very well now and then,” he said; but he only *saw* them — he *felt* them not — they entered not into his *soul*!

“Why, you are a set of dummies to-night, every one of you! Do, for goodness’ sake, say something! Nelly, put down that confounded garment, and try to amuse me, for I am bored to death.”

“Oh! uncle, how can you be, with this enchanting view before you, and with so many delicious books close at hand? Why don’t you learn to sew, Uncle Rob? Men must find it so wearisome, having nothing to do with their hands!”

“Well, I get no sympathy from *you*, I see; and it’s useless to apply to Mary, for she ‘can’t abide me,’ because I won’t read the Bible to dirty old women, and children with objectionable noses. I’m not *pious*!”

And he drew a long face.

“No, Robert, I am afraid you have spoken the truth; and you would not have overstated it if you had added, that your abstinence from scriptural reading was not confined to old women and children.”

My aunt spoke very gravely, for she could not bear to hear religion, and the charities which it enjoins, made the subject

of a jest before me and Edith; and the latter had laughed at her uncle's grimace, and at the speech which accompanied it.

"There, Mary, don't go on. Old maids were always ill-natured!"

My aunt smiled with a meaning smile, and replied not; but my mother was angry, and exclaimed:—

"I suppose, Robert, you think you have the right to call Mary 'old maid,' since you certainly did *your* best to avert from her that very terrible fate, which she nevertheless seems to court, or she would not persist (as she does, to my very great regret) in refusing Sir Frederic Crosier."

Uncle Rob was annoyed; he disliked Aunt Mary for two reasons:—firstly, because she had thought proper to refuse the honour of his hand some years before; and, secondly, on account of her influence over my mother: but he thought fit to swallow his resentment; and this little incident having disturbed our pleasant reverie, we strolled out in the grounds, where we were soon laughing and talking in high glee. Suddenly my uncle, with a wicked look at me, said:—

"Nelly, I see *somebody* appearing through the trees; somebody who has been away, and whose absence has made a blank in *one* heart that I could name. Nay, don't blush, Nelly!

"I am *not* blushing, uncle," was my quiet answer, though I felt very much annoyed.

But in a few minutes Oscar appeared, walking — or, rather, rushing — in his usual impetuous manner towards me.

"I've only just come back," were his first words; "I just ran in for five minutes to see the good folks at home, and then came straight here. How are you all? Well — to judge by your looks. Come, let us walk on."

As we did so, he managed to draw me behind the rest, saying, in a low tone:—

"Nelly, let us go to the bay; it must be enchanting there to-night."

"We had better not, Oscar; it would look rude and unkind to leave them."

(I was thinking of my uncle's speech.)

Oscar was offended. — "Oh! very well! Just as you like! It is rather hard, though, Nelly, to think that so short a time has made you forget me! I had set my heart on having a talk with you to-night in the dear old bay. We may not have

many more talks together; for when I get my commission, I can't expect to be much *here*, if even I remain in England. Heaven knows where I may be sent—to India, perhaps."

"Oh, Oscar! and *could* you think of leaving us all, to go away so far, and for so long? You cannot love us *much*!"

My voice trembled, and my eyes filled with tears—partly, at the thought of his possible departure—partly, at his being able to allude to it so calmly. However, I suffered him to lead me to the bay, and we sat there for some time in silence—I, watching the tiny waves that broke in rippling murmurs at my feet, and thinking very sadly over the many—many happy hours I had passed there with him; he, listlessly throwing pebbles in the water. At last he broke the silence:—

"You will forget me, Nelly, when I am gone. And now, I hear, you are coming out, and you will meet many whom you will like better than me."

"No—not one, Oscar—not one!"

I could no longer maintain my self-control; I gave way to a passionate fit of tears.

"What's the matter, Nelly? I didn't mean to pain you! Tell me what is the matter."

All his gentleness had returned, as he drew my hands from my face, and gazed on me with his old, earnest affection.

"I am very foolish to cry about such a trifle; but no, your going away is *not* a trifle, Oscar, but a great, great misfortune; it is that makes me so miserable. To think that I shall wake in the morning—not one, nor two mornings, but every day, for years—if you go away; and to know that I shall not take my dear, dear walks and rides with you, who have been my companion—my brother—for so long! And to think that *you* can bear to talk of it so coldly!"

And again my tears flowed.

Seizing my hands abruptly, and drawing me still closer to himself, he exclaimed,—

"Nelly—you must be my wife!—you must—you shall! I will *kill* any one else that shall dare to think of you! Oh, Nelly, don't go! (for in my first horror and consternation at this abrupt disclosure—so utterly divested of the conventionalities usual on such occasions—I was struggling to escape)—don't leave me! There—I will not hold you—I will be very quiet—I will leave you, if you wish it, directly you have given me an answer. Only one word—one little word. *Will* you be my wife?"

"Oh no, Oscar, no; how dreadful! Why have you done this? We can never again be brother and sister!"

I spoke with deep sadness; for I felt that no tie which could arise between us could equal that which he had now so cruelly snapped asunder.

He was furious.

"No? Dreadful?" he repeated, almost stamping with rage. "How *dare* you speak so to me? Do you know what I have done? I have chosen you, out of all the world, to be my wife! You are very young and inexperienced; only four years my junior, I allow—but compare your life with what mine has been of late. Why, you are a mere baby to *me*! I have seen numbers of girls—rich, beautiful, and accomplished—and not one of them, I dare swear, would have answered me as you have done!"

He suddenly changed his tone.

"Oh, Nelly, forgive me. I am a brute to speak to you so harshly—you, so gentle and timid, that a word will bring the tears to your eyes. My darling—oh, my darling—forget what I said; and, if you are really pained at the thought of being my wife, I will never again ask you; and we will again be brother and sister, as we were before."

I shook my head, sorrowfully; for I knew that that could never again be.

"But, perhaps, I only startled you; and, if I had asked less abruptly, your answer might, perhaps, have been different. I am a great bear of a fellow—not fit to deal with such a shrinking little lamb as you!"

He spoke of himself so reproachfully, that I was softened, and replied, again placing my hand in his,—

"Nay, Oscar, *I* was to blame; but I was so frightened that I hardly knew what I said. I was—I was—taken by surprise."

I added these last few words hesitatingly, and with confusion; but they were enough for him, for he interrupted me joyously.

"Then may I think that if I had *not* taken you by surprise (he mimicked my tones with a merry twinkle in his laughing blue eye) you *might* have answered like a well-bred young lady, instead of like a demented infant of ten? Eh?"

"But Oscar," I remonstrated, "I still wish you had not said all this (now don't be offended) it would have been time

enough when I had grown up to be a woman; now, I am only a child."

Oscar smiled tenderly upon me.

"Why, Nelly, darling, *you* will *always* be a child; it is your delightful *freshness of heart* that charms me out of my senses! During these last two seasons spent in town, I have seen no one to compare with you; and in the country—Heaven defend me from marrying a country-bred damsel! Now *you* have all the finish of a town-bred young lady, with the unsullied freshness and purity of a denizen of nature. Oh, I might travel from Dan to Beersheba, and not find your equal!"

"Hush, Oscar; you must not speak to me thus. Talk to me as you did before you said this; let us be plain Nelly and Oscar again."

"So we will, darling; but you have not yet answered my question. 'To be, or not to be?' Oh, Nelly! I'm not joking. Your answer is more to me than you can imagine; for if you refuse me I must not see you again; and I shall lose friend, sister, wife, all in one. Speak, Nelly."

Then I answered, in low, trembling accents,—

"Oscar, I could not bear to lose you."

It was enough; he understood me; and poured forth the rapid and incoherent expression of his thanks. I interrupted him.

"Yet, Oscar, I should not think of marrying now; it would be absurd—ridiculous! You are not much more than a boy; while I am still a child in the school-room. So we will continue to be, to each other, as far as possible, just what we were before; and, if we are in the same mind three or four years hence—since you *will* have it so—I shall not refuse any longer."

My reader, you may think this an over-prudent speech for a girl of sixteen; but you must remember that even my childish intellect had been prematurely developed by solitary reflection, by the study of well-chosen books, and by constant interchange of thought with my good Aunt Mary, who had given me the habit of checking my impulses, and acting, as far as possible, with sense and discretion. Education—and one such as is seldom given to women, solid and substantial, calculated for heart, mind, and judgment—had completed, in my later years, what Aunt Mary's care had begun in infancy.

"So be it, Nelly," replied Oscar, in his gayest tones; "I ask for nothing more."

And we sat there feeling very, very happy, till, remembering that it was getting late, we rose to depart. Before leaving, I turned to take a last look at the scene. *How* it was changed! When we came there, the setting sun was shining on the blue, sparkling waves, bathing their silver crests in golden radiance; while the sky was almost cloudless. Now the sea was of one dull, leaden hue; heavy clouds were fast piling themselves on each other; and a low, booming, mournful sound, sighed over the face of the deep. A feeling of sadness unutterable stole upon me, as, in silence, I gave my hand to Oscar, to ascend the cliff; and, still in silence, we crossed the lake.

"What makes my little sister so mournful to-night?"

"It is foolish, I know, Oscar; but oh, how I wish the sea had remained calm, and the moon had shewn her sweet, pale face, on the blue water."

"You silly child! What foolish ideas! And so, you thought that that stormy sky, and troubled ocean, and mournful gusty wind, were typical of the future! My darling! I will make it so bright for you, that when, some day or other, I recall to you this night, you will laugh at your wild fancies, and gloomy forebodings!"

There was no resisting his manner, and I was soon as light-hearted as before.

"Good-night, my darling," he said, as he kissed my hands on leaving me at the door.

Pleading a head-ache, which was the truth, I retired to my room almost directly; but, instead of going to bed, sat before the picture of my lost mother, gazing at it earnestly, and wondering what *her* life had been. Thus had I remained some time, when my dear mamma entered, and, kneeling down beside me, clasped her arms round me, saying, in tender accents,—

"What ails you, my darling? Tell me; there is something on your mind!"

"I don't *like* to tell you, mamma!"

"Then I must guess. Has Oscar been saying anything to you?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Has he been asking you to marry him?"

"Yes."

"And what answer did you make, my child?"

"I told him, mamma dear, that I was too young to think of marrying, and that I wished he had not thought of it either; and then I said, that perhaps, if we were both in the same mind some years hence, I might then give a different answer. Was that right, dear mamma?"

"Yes, my darling—quite right. But I am vexed at this, which, however, I ought to have foreseen!"

"But why, mamma? Oscar is very good; and you like him—"

Yes, darling; but he is the only person you have yet seen much of;—you may meet some one you will prefer—"

"No, mamma!"—I spoke with quiet decision;—No; I can answer for *myself*; and if *he* should not change—"

"Well, dear child, I will talk with your aunt about it, and with Oscar, and his parents;—so don't look so terribly anxious, you poor little darling—but go to bed at once."

And, tenderly kissing me, she left me, and I lay down to sleep.

Ere long, I was awakened by the raging of the storm, which had been gathering for some hours. The rain poured in torrents, the lightning flashed, the wind howled and screamed, as though many demons had been let loose, and were fighting in the air; and, even at that distance, I could hear the thundering surges, as they burst in maddened fury on the cliffs. Such a storm had not been known for years.

I thought of the little, tranquil bay, which I might never again visit with the same blithe feeling as before; and, contrasting its peace and calm with the present raging storm, I buried my face in the pillow, and wept.

Hark! Another crash of the thunder, as though the very heavens were falling upon us—it seemed to split the roof!—And a blinding glare, that made me shudder!

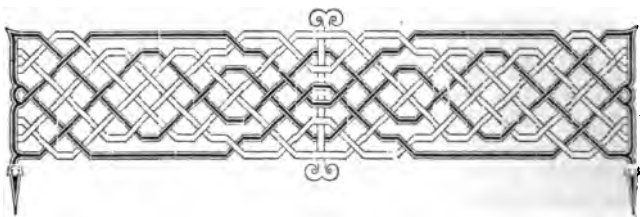
My door was thrown violently open; and little Edith ran, screaming, into the room.

"Oh! Nelly, Nelly! take me into your bed! Hide me—hide me!—It is awful!"

And she clung, in frenzied terror, round my neck.

All that night, while the storm continued, I soothed the trembling child, and at last hushed her tranquilly to sleep in my arms.

Alas! Alas!—Was this, too, a presage of the future?



Congenial Hope! thy passion-kindling power,
How bright, how strong, in youth's untroubled hour!

PLEASURES OF HOPE!

THE wind still howled the next day; but the rain had ceased. Full of thoughts called forth by the events of the preceding evening, I went out, and, wishing to be alone, bent my steps towards the bay, which the receding tide had left almost dry. Cautiously, I descended the slippery crag, and stood on the spot I had occupied the preceding night. It looked hardly the same as before; for the large stone on which I had been seated was no longer there, but had been wrenched violently from its bed; and there, in its place was a broken anchor,—no doubt belonging to one of the many wrecks with which the whole coast was strewn.

As I gazed, with mournful forebodings upon this sad emblem of hopes destroyed, my heart sank within me, and again I wished that that evening were but a dream;—it seemed to have made me years older—to have converted me from a happy, careless child, into a woman. Soon, however, I rallied myself upon my weakness.—“Why, Nelly, Nelly,” I said mentally, “what are you thinking of? Have you not every cause to be happy, instead of miserable? Did you imagine that you could go on for ever, nursing rabbits and kittens, and making dolls’ frocks for Edith? You *must* marry some day—because every one does;—why, then, repine, when Oscar is the person you like best in all the world—next to your own family? Suppose he had married some one else—how would you have liked it? Why, not at all—to be sure!—Then, don’t be so ungrateful!” Thus reasoning with myself, I returned home, and met my mother’s anxious

look with a cheerful smile which completely reassured her. That day, she talked seriously with Oscar; and there was also a confabulation with the Herberts, who came to discuss the subject with my mother. Finally, it was decided that it should be, as I had first told Oscar, not a positive engagement, yet that no restriction should be laid upon our intercourse; and that if, in three years' time, we were still so inclined, we should be married. Oscar was in transports of delight, and could talk of nothing else when we were together.

"Nelly," he said, "it is all very well for them to say we are not engaged; that does not alter the *fact*. I consider myself bound, in honour, to you, as you are to me; and, even if we do not marry for twenty years, it will make no difference: you have no power to recede—nor have I."

"Oh, Oscar!" I exclaimed—"don't say that! *You* may change;—but as for *me*, it is impossible! Men are more changeable than women!"

"Not *always*, Nelly;—you will find me an exception to the rule. How happy we shall be! You shall have everything in the world, that you can possibly wish for. *Such* horses! *such* carriages! Oh, my darling Nelly!—you shall be so happy!"

Aunt Mary was the only one who did not seem perfectly content; and it was rather a drawback to my joy, for Oscar had now talked me into his view of the case; and I wondered how I could ever have thought otherwise.

"Dear Aunt," I one day said to her, "I wish I could get you to take a brighter view of it. Now, what can you possibly see in Oscar to dislike?"

"Nelly, I see nothing to *dislike* in Oscar; on the contrary, there is everything in him to *like*. But, my child, he wants the 'one thing needful,' and without that, I fear that he will neither make you happy, nor be so himself."

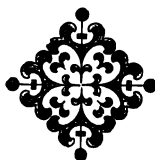
"But, dear Aunt Mary, very few *men* are religious; they are not so quiet and thoughtful as we are; besides which, they lead a bustling, active life, which does not conduce to quiet reflection: and they have not our gentleness, to enable them to receive the truths of religion as we do. Oh! you hardly ever meet a religious man."

"Not often, I grant; but they *are* to be met with; and I do wish that my Nelly had been fortunate enough to light upon one of those exceptions."

"Well, Aunt, I am sure *I* don't know a religious man. There is Uncle Rob—he is not religious; nor Sir William Ashton; nor Mr. Herbert; nor (not, at least, in the *strict* sense of the word) Mr. Annesley; nor, I think (but am not quite sure), Sir Frederic Crosier. Mr. Phillips is, but then he is a clergyman; but his curate, Mr. Harrison, is not—at least, not what *I* call—religious. Mr. Grayson is, I think; and Mr. Percival *certainly* is. Now, Aunt, out of all those there are only three—two of them clergymen."

"Nelly, I should like you to marry a clergyman; but, as I am afraid it is too late now, I will try to look on the bright side of things. Only, for my part, I could not place any *very* great reliance on a man's affection if his principles were not based on sound religion."

After this, Aunt Mary tried, as she said, to "make the best of it"; and I also promised that I would try to lead Oscar's thoughts into a more serious channel: so she, too, became at last almost reconciled to the match. I saw very little more of Oscar than before; for I still continued my studies with unabated ardour, partly at my mother's desire, partly because I wished, by cultivating my intellect, to do more credit to Oscar's choice. Besides, I never allowed anything to interfere with my Thursday and Sunday afternoons with Aunt Mary; so that my time was fully occupied.





All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
AS YOU LIKE IT.

THERE was to be a pic-nic at a place nine miles off. It was to be given by my mother, the Herberts, Elliots, Annesleys, and Ashtons. The Graysons, Miss Campbell and her nieces, the Misses Phillips and brothers, Mr. Harrison, Mr. Percival, Sir Frederic Crosier, and several others, were invited; and it was to be a very grand affair. We were to dine in a wood, and at night we were to have dancing in a tent, which was to be erected in a charming hollow, surrounded by sloping banks. Some of the party were to ride, some to drive. Oscar and I of course preferred the former mode of conveyance; and, as he lifted me into the saddle on as bright an afternoon as ever shone, I felt as happy as a bird.

"My darling," he whispered, in low and tender accents, "how beautiful you are! That velvet hat, with its graceful floating plume, suits you to perfection; and a riding-habit is the only dress that *can* display a figure such as yours! My *own* Nelly, I am so proud of you!"

I blushed, for his praise was dear to me—ah! dearer than I myself knew.

"You will make me vain, Oscar," was my answer, in low murmuring, happy tones.

A little further on we met another party of equestrians, Florence and Percy Elliot, and their cousin Blanche. Florence Elliot had somehow or other heard of my engagement with Oscar, and owed me a grudge for the same, she having herself cherished a design upon his hand. As we mingled our parties, Blanche pressed my hand warmly, and her glance told me that she wished me all happiness. Florence *affected* the

same good feeling; but as it sprang not from the *heart*, she failed most signally.

"Nelly," said Oscar, "I wonder if that affair between Percy and Blanche will come to anything?"

"I don't know, Oscar; but I hope so; for it has been going on for some time, and I think they would be happy together. Blanche is a sweet creature; and I like Percy, too, very much indeed. I wonder how Florence would approve of it?"

"I don't think that Florence would approve of *anything* that gave happiness to another."

"Oh! Oscar, don't say so! Poor Florence!"

"'Poor Florence!' That *is* good! Why, *she* does not think herself at all to be pitied; she fancies herself as good-looking as Blanche, depend upon it. Oh! by the bye, we shall have rich fun to-day. You know how attentive Harrison, the curate, was to Blanche the other night at the Elliots? Well, he thought *she* was Mrs. Elliot's daughter; and he has been sounding me about her expectations, little dreaming that I saw through him. So I have put him on a wrong scent, by telling him that Blanche is poor, but that Florence is a great 'catch,' and, if I mistake not, he will turn over his affections to that young lady. Percy will, of course, inherit nearly all his father's money; so Mr. Curate will find himself immensely sold; and Florence, after glorying in the idea of cutting out Blanche, will find herself also in a state of 'sell.' It will be immense fun!" And he broke into a joyous fit of laughter.

"Now, Oscar, that is really very wrong. I am very sorry you should have done so. Poor Florence's affections may become seriously engaged!"

"*Her* affections! As if they ever did or could centre in any one but herself. A rich idea, truly! But here we are, just at the end of of our journey."

And, putting our horses into a canter, we had in a few minutes arrived at our destination, where most of the party were already assembled. Dismounting, we joined my mother and aunt, and little Edith, who, with Amy Crosier, had been allowed to accompany mamma; and, with Mr. Percival and Sir Frederic, we sauntered about while the dinner was being prepared. No one knew of my engagement with Oscar; and as my mother had enjoined me not to make myself in the least conspicuous with him, I always made a point of associating quite as much with others as with him. So this day I

was a great deal with Mr. Percival, whom I liked very much; for, besides talking very amusingly, it *did me good* to be with him: I always felt happier and better after spending an hour in his society.

"So you and your inseparable companion rode," he said, as we walked on. "I delight in the exercise myself; but as I cannot afford the luxury of a horse, I very seldom indulge in riding."

As we turned into the wood, we heard the sound of voices, and came suddenly upon Mrs. Annesley and a tall, handsome man. They were walking arm-in-arm when we first saw them; but hearing our approach, Mrs. Annesley withdrew her hand, and stooped to pick a flower, then walked on in a very demure manner.

"Nelly, do you *know* Mrs. Annesley?" asked Mr. Percival, very gravely.

"Only a little," I replied.

"Then, my Nelly, I advise you not to *cultivate* her acquaintance; she is far from being a sensible woman, and at *your* age you should seek the friendship of those who can do you some good. Mrs. Annesley is unfortunate, poor thing! in having no children to interest her thoughts. We must not be too hard upon her. But as for her companion, avoid him, Nelly, by all means!" (he spoke more impressively than usual). "Nelly, *promise* me that you will shun that man! I know more of him than you suppose, and I believe him to be utterly devoid of heart and principle! Have I your promise?"

"Yes; and I thank you for your advice."

He continued speaking in rapid, earnest tones.

"I know, my child, that he could not, by his conversation, in the slightest degree impair your principles, for they are based upon a sure foundation, and you have something better than your *own* strength to rely upon; but I feel as if his mere *glance* were desecration to your youth and purity. I know what has been his past life, and that wherever he goes he seems to bear with him a moral pestilence, which withers and blights all before him. If Edith were of your age, I should fear his influence for her."

"Oh! why?"

"Because she takes her tone from the passing events of the moment, and suffers herself to be led and influenced by that

which enchants her *fancy*, instead of by what satisfies her *judgment*. Because she acts from *impulse*, not *reflection*. Because she is utterly wanting in self-denial, self-control, and a true feeling of religion."

"Oh, Mr. Percival!" I remonstrated, in surprised and mournful accents. "Don't speak so of poor little Edith: she is *but* a child!"

"True; and I do not expect to find in a child the wisdom of a grown-up person; but I have studied little Edie's character of late, and I find that even the *germs* of excellence are wanting in it. Already are sown in her heart the seeds of many evil qualities; already is her mind choked with weeds and brambles. Root them out, Nelly; painful as will be the effort, root them out, and plant in her heart the germs of the good fruit, or she will bring sorrow upon us all! She is a sweet, fascinating little creature, and, with due care and attention, would grow up to be a good and amiable, but, I fear, a *weak* woman. Could you bear to see her a gay, frivolous being, caring for little save her own amusement and pleasure, an unloving wife, a heartless mother?"

"Oh, no!" I answered, still more sadly than before. "But Edith is so good, and gentle, and affectionate. I am *sure* you are mistaken."

"'Good, and gentle, and affectionate'? Yes; how could she be otherwise, when she is never thwarted — when you all uprite in flattering and spoiling her, and in teaching her to make *self* the first object of consideration? *You* were *quite* different at her age."

"Perhaps so," I argued; "but how very differently I had been treated! My dear mamma, as you know, did not then spoil me as she does now; and Aunt Mary was never weary of correcting my faults. Why, Edith — spoilt as you say she is — is an angel compared with what I was at her age."

He smiled. — "Do you think so, Nelly? Well, I see that you are resolved not to be convinced. But we had better return now, for the mighty festal arrangements are no doubt completed."

So we returned, and found the whole party seated on the grass, under the trees, where a collation had been spread. All were in high spirits; and good humour seemed to prevail. Even Florence Elliot looked amiable — and no wonder — for was not Mr. Harrison by her side, and devoted in his atten-

tions? Blanche seemed perfectly resigned to the desertion of her admirer, and she and Percy talked together in low earnest tones, seemingly forgetful of all the world but themselves. Minnie Ashton looked tired, and rather sad: not so Mr. Grayson, who had managed to esconce himself beside her, and who seemed perfectly happy — not talking much, but looking “unutterable things” at Minnie, and occasionally venturing a remark, which Minnie, whose thoughts were evidently somewhere else, answered at random. Sir Frederic Crosier, my mother, aunt, and Oscar (who always kept close to them when he was not allowed to monopolize me), were together. I felt sad, for I was thinking of all that Mr. Percival had been saying; and I placed myself next to my sister, who was exchanging vows of affection with her little friend, Amy Crosier. Oscar soon spied me, and joined us.

“What’s the matter, Nelly? You are looking quite miserable. Are you tired, dear?”

“A little, Oscar,” I replied; for I did not like to tell *him* the cause of my sadness: he would have ridiculed me unsparingly.

“You must keep quiet, then; after dinner all the people will pair off, and then you must fall to my share.”

“I say, Nelly,” he went on, “have you seen how attentive Crosier is to your Aunt Mary? Depend upon it, something will come of that; though I do believe Minnie Ashton would break her heart, and then Grayson would die of despair. And just look at the parson and Florence! Capital!”

“Hush, Oscar, how you talk! Suppose people were to speak so of us, what would you say?”

“Say? Why that I would not give up my own little Nelly for all the world!”

I could not resist telling Oscar what Mr. Percival had been saying to me about Edith; for, indeed, I could not but feel the truth of all that he had said.

“I thought there must have been some sermon going on,” he replied. “I do think clergymen should confine such discourses to the pulpit, and not interlard their every-day life with continual preaching. Religion may be all very well in its way; but one *may* have too much of a good thing, you know.”

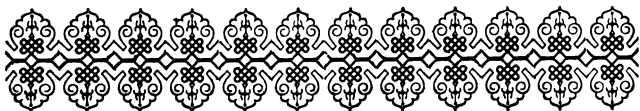
Aunt Mary’s words here came to my memory, and I sighed deeply.

"Now I declare I will not have my own Nelly look so sad, as though something dreadful were going to happen. But I really shall be jealous of these parsons. First, Harrison monopolising all the nice girls; then, Percival talking a whole hour with you. Really, it is too bad!"

When Oscar was in this kind of mood, he would rattle on upon all sorts of topics, jeering at this and laughing at that, till the whole generally wound up with an immoderate fit of laughter. So it was now. His mirth was infectious: I felt my sadness vanishing, and was again quite happy with Oscar by my side. In the evening, after tea, we repaired to the tent, and dancing concluded a very happy day.

That night, before going to bed, I stole quietly into little Edith's room, and, bending over her, murmured a prayer that I might have courage to root out the brambles and weeds from her little tender heart; that my eyes might be opened to see where they lay: for this little child appeared to my sight perfection.





While the brisk dance and lively strain
Bid mirth appear, nor bid in vain.

THE winter was again at hand. Nothing very material had happened, except that Oscar had got his commission; but as his regiment was stationed at B——, he rode over every day, and was thus with me almost as much as ever.

Mr. Percival was much at Rocklands; for I had candidly confessed to him that I could not see Edith's faults, and had begged *him* to try what he could do to correct those which *he* saw in her. However, she was so petted by all of us, that, when he attempted to talk gravely to her, she pouted, and looked offended, so that he had little chance of doing her any good; besides which, she had an irresistibly coaxing way with her, and just when he thought he was gaining ground, and that the child was attending to what he said, she would plead:—

“There, don't be cross any more; I've been good all this time! Now, come and play.”

And she would drag him off with her; nor could he himself help laughing, or resist her influence. She was now well drilled at her lessons, and could learn well enough when she chose—but that was not often; so that she knew about as much as an ordinary child of seven. Her loveliness was increasing; her features were small and delicately formed, and her complexion dazzlingly fair; but her chief beauty lay in the rare combination of very light—almost white—hair, with large dark eyes. Truly, she was a miracle of beauty!

We often saw Minnie Ashton. She was much quieter than she used to be; and a shade of sadness had of late passed

across her fair and gentle brow. Poor Minnie! she was a tender, fragile creature, whom no one could help loving. My aunt was very fond of her.

"Minnie," she said, one day, "do you feel well?"

"Yes," she replied, in her quiet, mournful voice.

"Then what makes you so sad and subdued? You have not been yourself of late, dear Minnie."

And my aunt regarded her anxiously, and sighed.

"I was never *very* gay, you know," she murmured; "and perhaps I am not quite well; but indeed you must not notice my looks, dear Miss Dudley."

"But," persisted my aunt, "I cannot bear to see you so changed. I fear you have some anxiety. Nay, dearest Minnie, do not turn aside. Can *I* do nothing? Will you not tell me?"

But Minnie burst into tears as she replied:—

"Oh! question me no further! If I *have* any grief, it is none that I can divulge; it will pass away, or I shall conquer it. Or," she added quietly, "it may conquer me! God knows!"

After that my aunt watched Minnie Ashton, that she might discover her secret, and, if possible, serve her. And that she did serve her was proved by the events of after years; but this, like all her gentle life, was an endeavour made in sacrifice of self.



The broadest mirth unfeeling folly wears.
POPE'S ESSAY ON MAN.

WE were one day seated round the fire, talking with Mr. Percival, when Oscar entered.

"Have you heard the news?" he said.

"What news?"

"That Mrs. Annesley has gone off with Baltimore."

And he laughed heartily. He added—

"I said it would be so. Such a stupid old fool as Annesley not to see what was going on!"

Oscar laughed heartily.

"Oscar," said Mr. Percival, more sternly than I had ever heard him speak, "you have spoken heartlessly. May God, in His infinite mercy, never afflict *you* as it has pleased Him to afflict this most wretched husband."

And he rose to take leave of us.

Oscar's brow clouded over; he looked black as night.

"And what right have you," he haughtily exclaimed, "to interfere with me, or to pass censure on my conduct? If you do it in your capacity of clergyman, you will please to remember that I am not one of your congregation, and that you are usurping the functions of another!"

Mr. Percival smiled.

"What *right* have I, Oscar? The right that every human being has, to tell another when he does wrong. The right which *you* would have to warn *me* if you saw me go astray. It is *more* than a right—it is a positive *duty*. Nor do I address you in my *clerical* capacity—(he smiled)—indeed, I wish you would forget that I am a parson, when you are talking with

me. I enter this house an old and sincere friend; and I have the interest of all here so warmly at heart, that I am, it may be, over-zealous for their welfare. Perhaps I spoke too warmly just now; you are a fine fellow, Oscar, and I like you, and should be sorry if you misunderstood me. Come—shake hands.”

“Nay,” said Oscar, with his usual impetuosity, “it is for *me* to apologise. My hasty temper is always getting me into scrapes. You did quite right to speak your mind just now; and I am much obliged to you for it. However, I can’t, for the life of me, feel any pity for Annesley; he does seem to have been so blind.”

“Oh! Oscar,” said my aunt, “speak gently; such a misfortune might one day happen to yourself, or to any one who chanced to marry a woman of Mrs. Annesley’s disposition; and, if kindness, and the most unsuspecting confidence, had no power to touch her heart, depend upon it, not all the watching and precaution in the world would have availed.”

“Nonsense, Aunt Mary,” laughed Oscar; “he brought it on himself, and I don’t pity him; and, as to such a thing happening to *me*!—my dear Aunt Mary, you are demented! But where are you going?” he added, to Mr. Percival.

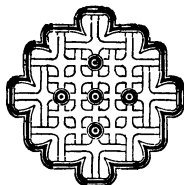
“To see my friend, poor Annesley. I sincerely trust that it may all prove to have been a mistake; but, if not, I will do my best to console him—poor fellow!”

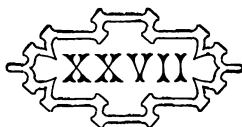
And he left.

I felt very sad. With my whole heart had I joined him in condemnation of Oscar; and, as I bent in silence over my work, my eyes were dim with the tears that were slowly gathering; and, for the first time, I felt a chill and dread creep over me as I thought of the future, and of him. My thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the entrance of Uncle Robert, who had slept at B—the night before, and now burst into the room, full of the news. Nor did he confine himself to the sober recital of the tale; he embellished it with a graphic and (what he considered) highly humorous description of the perplexity of the unfortunate husband, when made aware of his loss; and he mixed up with it a good many pleasantries, at which he and Oscar laughed heartily. At last my mother’s severe rebuke stopped them; but, before that, I had left the room, and, in solitude, had given way to tears such as I had never shed since I was a child. Was this the being to whom I had almost pledged myself for life?—whom I had thought so

good, and kind, and unselfish?—on whose principles depended my life-long happiness or misery?

I thought long, and sadly; but I was determined to see the truth, and to be guided by it. And I prayed earnestly for strength and wisdom from the one true and unerring source. I rose from my knees, strengthened to perform what I considered an absolute duty. And yet how I shrank from it!





"No! here I kneel, a beggar, at thy feet."
He said, and knelt—with accents, softer still,
He wooed the weakness of a failing will
And erring judgment—took her hand, and cried,
"Withdraw it not!—O! let it thus abide,
Pledge of thy love—upon thy act depend
My joy, my hope,—thus they begin, or end!
Withdraw it not!" He saw her looks expressed
Favour and grace—the hand was firmer pressed;
Signs of opposing fear no more were shown,
And, as he pressed, he felt it was his own!

CRABBE.

WE were standing side by side on the shore of the little bay. We had walked thither in silence, and he had vainly asked the reason of my sad, subdued manner; I had only answered,—

"I will tell you presently, Oscar."

And now I spoke in short, abrupt sentences; for my heart felt breaking, and my strength seemed insufficient for the task that was before me.

"Oscar—here, where the happiest moments of my life have been passed—here, where you first told me that you loved me—do I now try to dispel the illusion that you have cast around me! Here do I tell you that we must forget the past, and be no more to each other than brother and sister; for I can never be your wife (my voice was trembling strangely). No! never—never!"

He seized my hands—he drew me closer to him—he

gazed into my eyes, as if he would read my very soul. The scrutiny seemed to content him; for he released my hands, and calmly asked—

“Why? for you still love me!”

“I do! I do!” I sobbed forth; for I had now fairly given way.

“Then why this strange conduct? Explain yourself! Nay, Nelly, dearest, I meant not to be harsh; if you knew what a storm of feeling your words have raised, you would wonder that I can be so calm!”

He took my hands, and pressed them against his heart, which was beating to suffocation.

“Oh, Nelly! Nelly! unsay those words—for you *could* not mean them!”

“I cannot, Oscar; I had thought well before I spoke—and it must be so!”

“Why?—tell me why.”

“Because,” I replied, in trembling accents, “because, if I married you, you would not make me happy! Because, you always act from impulse, and never from reflection. (My voice was gaining strength). Because you despise religion, and do not believe in the happiness which it brings. Because I am afraid that you are heartless—and—and—selfish!”

He drew himself up, and, for a moment, looked at me with fury; then, touched by the intense and helpless misery of my face, he threw his arms around me, exclaiming passionately,—

“Nelly! Nelly! You cannot—you shall not—persist in this horrible determination! Your love is more to me than life; without it, I should loathe the very air I breathe! If you cast me from you, you will have to answer for the wreck of an existence which you might have redeemed and purified! For I tell you, that if you persist in driving me from you, you will take from me the only motive I have for correcting my faults—the hope of rendering myself worthy to be your husband! Oh, Nelly! Nelly! I know that you speak the truth! My faults are far greater than you think! Teach me—help me—to correct them, and to be all that you would have me be! You may do with me as you will; you may reform me, or you may drive me to ruin and despair!”

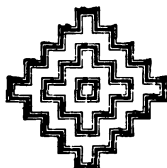
And he—the strong—the proud—the self-sufficient—burst into an agony of tears!

What could I do—I, a young, inexperienced girl of sixteen

— against such reasoning, — and that, too, from one I loved so well? The sight of his anguish completed what his words had begun; and, as we stood there, hand-in-hand, gazing on the dark, sullen ocean, I murmured, —

“Yes — yours in life — in death! Come what may — in weal or woe — yours, Oscar, for ever!”

And his lips, tenderly pressed upon my forehead, sealed the vow that deprived me of my freedom!





Fortune is the sun of life,
All is warm and bright then;
Every step with pleasure rife,
Time is all delight then!
Love is glancing 'neath its ray,
All is fair and fond then;
Life is just a summer day —
Not a care beyond then!

Poverty's the night of life,
All is dark and drear then;
Every step with sorrow rife,
Every day's a fear then!
Friendship, like a star above,
Glimmers high and cold then;
Love — alas! the hopes of love —
Scorned, as soon as told then!—SWAIN.

It is a sad thing when a woman loves where she does not esteem. Often, alas! do her own principles become warped by a union with one whom her heart cannot resist, but whom her judgment condemns. How often have I heard a young girl say, confidently, with respect to some one against whom all her friends have done their best to warn her—

“*I will reclaim him! He will do anything for me! My influence shall lead him to do what is right!*”

Ah—poor child! You forget that his influence over your weak, loving heart, is far greater than yours over his! You forget that *he* is a *man*—strong and mighty in his will; and that this love, which is, to *you*, all the world, is to *him* but an *episode* in his life! You forget, or will not believe, that woman's influence does not always *increase* (alas! how often is it the reverse!) after marriage; if you are able to maintain your *own* principles pure and unsullied, rejoice, for few are so successful. But oh! if you love where you do not esteem,

pause before you take the last, irrevocable step; for, believe me, it is dangerous to place any reliance upon the fidelity or high principles of a man whose notions of honour are not based upon some surer foundation than the verdict of his fellow-creatures.

Honour!—that word so little understood! How often is it a mere phantom of the imagination! How very few understand its meaning—in its truest, loftiest sense! If a man omit paying a gambling debt—contracted, it may be, with a person of depraved and vicious principles—he is said to be *wanting in honour*, and is shunned by all men. And it is right that it should be so; for, in gambling transactions, a man's *word* is the only security for the payment of the debt (since he cannot *legally* be forced to pay) therefore, in breaking that word, he has, in fact, failed in *one* point of honour. But, let the same man mislead a poor, credulous girl, who trusts him—trusts to his simple word, though she knows it is all she has to rely on—and he still walks, with head erect, and proud and haughty bearing, amongst his fellow-men; for, according to *their* verdict, he has committed *no* breach of honour!

I once knew a man who gained the affections of an unsuspecting, warm-hearted girl—gained them by such persevering assiduity, by such vows of unalterable affection, that her heart was won *for ever*; and then, when the mischief was done, and her life's happiness was sacrificed, he informed her that a "sense of honour" compelled him to part from her, since it was utterly out of his power to make her his wife! It is true that she was portionless; that he was perfectly dependent on his father, who was inexorably resolved that his son should marry a fortune; still he had hands to work, and a keen and profound intellect to plan and devise; and, if he had chosen to give up a few rather strong prejudices, he could have made her his wife. But no, he preferred to suffer (and he *did* suffer most intensely) the pain of separation; he preferred rather to break her heart, than to sacrifice those luxuries and comforts which, from long habit, he considered indispensable; or to overcome the obstacles that lay in his path, and of which, moreover, he was aware, before he tried to gain her affections. He loved her madly—passionately—despairingly—but he loved *himself* more; and he parted from her. *Her* life became a blank. And his? Not long after, he married

where there were *no* obstacles to be overcome, no sacrifices to be made. Was he happy? I know not. Yet this man was one of the many who are pronounced, by their fellow-men, "the very soul of honour!" Alas! that the word should be so profaned! But, to return to my narrative.

I believe that I was never again quite so happy as I had been with Oscar. I felt that I loved him so dearly, that I *could* not leave him, whatever might be his faults; but my reason did not acquiesce in the decision of my heart; and thus the first illusion of my young life was being dispelled.

I did not much like Uncle Rob, not only on account of his propensity to ridicule all that I had been taught to consider good and holy, but because I feared that his influence and example did Oscar a great deal of harm; and I wished, from my heart, that Uncle Rob had remained in India. Then, too, his frequent and mysterious conversations with my mother alarmed me, for she was always terribly depressed after such interviews; so that I connected him in some way with her sorrow, and learnt altogether to consider Uncle Rob a marplot. I could see, too, that my aunt did not like him. And thus, amidst hopes and fears, time, which never stops for any one, passed on, and the spring had come;—an eventful spring to me, for I was to make my *début* in London society. Aunt Mary was not going, at which I felt very sad; but some of our friends were, so that I hoped it would not seem quite so strange to me. The Ashtons would be there, and the Herberts, and Elliots, and Sir Frederic Crosier. Oscar, too, had managed to get leave, or I think I *could* not have torn myself away.

It was Sunday, and we were to leave early next morning. I was spending this last day with dear Aunt Mary, who was giving me all sorts of charges, as seriously as if I were going to India instead of to London. We were both very sad, for we had not parted for a long time, not since that memorable occasion in my childhood.

"Oh, Nelly!" she said, in her sweet, low voice, "I wish you were back again, and that I had found you still the same dear, innocent child you are now! You will meet with so many temptations—" she hesitated, and then resumed: "yes, my darling, I may as well tell you what you will hear from all.—You are very beautiful—as beautiful as your poor mother was when she first entered on the gay and fascinating

life which is now before you. Your beauty may be a snare to you, as it is, alas! to many."

"Oh, no, Aunt Mary! If I am beautiful, I am glad of it — oh, *so* glad! — for Oscar will love me all the more; but if *he* ceased to care for me, I would as soon be plain."

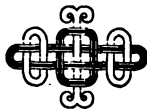
"Think ever thus, my darling; and when you are a wife, think it more than ever. And, Nelly, write to me *very* often; tell me *everything* that concerns yourself, even the minutest trifles. I shall read your letters over and over again, dear child. Ah! do not neglect to write. Remember all that I have been to you."

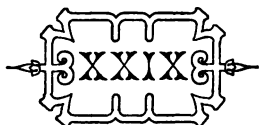
"Dear Aunt Mary, need you remind me of *that*? Are you not in the place of my lost mother? Yes, even before my second mother, who is so good to me?"

I spoke reproachfully, clinging round her neck as I had done when I was a child.

I could not sleep that night for excitement; and the next morning, waking very early, I rose, and went round to take one more leave of all my old haunts. Then there was a hasty breakfast, eaten in silence by all save little Edie, who was in transports of delight at the prospect of seeing London. Aunt Mary was there; and the tears stood in the large blue eyes which were mournfully bent upon me with an earnest anxiety that went to my heart. The carriage was at the door. One last, fond embrace from my dear, gentle friend, and we were rapidly borne away from the scenes of my childhood. I will pass over the journey. I shall not easily forget my sensations as we rattled through the brilliantly lighted streets, and the carriage stopped before a large house in Grosvenor-street. It was night. Little Edith, who, what with her wonderment at the changing horses, and the new towns, and the different dialects and faces, and the strange inns, had been in a state of lunacy all the way, now squeezed my hand convulsively, as she asked, her large eyes brilliant with excitement —

"Is this really London, Nelly?"





WE were going to a ball at Lady L——'s. Lord L—— was an old friend of my father's, and a very kind, good man; and his wife, a distant relation of my own mother, was equally agreeable. They had one daughter—a fair, delicate-looking girl of eighteen. I was dressed this evening in pink crape, looped up with roses, and wore a wreath of the same in my hair. As Oscar folded the delicate white satin cloak around me, and gently lifted me into the carriage, he whispered—

“My own Nelly! You grow more beautiful every time I see you. How proud—how *proud* I am of you, my darling?”

I felt too happy to remember that *such* an affection was not so sure to last as if it were founded on *esteem*. But Oscar cared little for the qualities of the mind or heart; he was a passionate worshipper of externals, and loved the *physically* more than the *morally* beautiful.

The Elliotts were at Lady L——'s, Blanche looking exceedingly well in her robe of pure white; Florence looked, as usual, plain and spiteful. Minnie Ashton seemed in better spirits, and there was a slight flush on her delicate cheek, and a soft, bright light in her gentle blue eyes, which had been sadly wanting there of late. I did not dance many times, for my mother did not approve of it; but a great many gentlemen, who had been introduced to me, stood round my mother and myself, talking to us. Some of them, I liked, some, I thought very silly; but I wished, with all my heart, that they would find other partners, so that Oscar and I could sit beside my mother, and watch and talk about all that was going on.

Having described one party, it will serve as a sample for all, since I generally met a great many of the same people over and over again, till at last I began to think that parties were very dull, tame, wearisome things after all. Besides, it forms no part of my story to relate much of the gay doings of a London season, saving so far as it may shew that in the phases of a life in which there has been much of sorrow, there has also occurred much of what the world characterises as joy. I must not omit, however, to mention, as it gave rise to a serious conversation with my mother about Oscar, that not many weeks after the ball at Lady L——'s, I received a proposal of marriage from a Captain Wedgwood, to whom I had been introduced by my friends. My mother accompanied me to my room, and thus addressed me:

"Nelly, darling, I must give Captain Wedgwood his answer to-morrow. Think well before you reject him. He is rich, handsome, estimable—all that most young ladies care for in a husband. He is a good man, and would, I think, make you happy, if you liked him."

I was perfectly horrified at this speech of my mother's. For an instant I remained staring at her in an excess of astonishment; then broke forth the words—

"Mamma! Mamma! what do you mean? *I* marry! *I* ever think of, or care for, even for a moment, any one but Oscar!"

I was indignant; but unjustly so. My mother looked vexed, as she replied, in her usual gentle tone,—

"I thought, Nelly, that it was arranged, and thoroughly understood, that you and Oscar should not consider yourselves engaged. I had hoped, that what I regarded as a mere boy-and-girl attachment would die away, if not stimulated by opposition; for I quite agree with your aunt, that Oscar is not the person of all others calculated to make you happy."

"Aunt Mary!" I exclaimed passionately;—"has she *dared?*—" and then flashed across me the remembrance of the sweet, loving face, which had bent so tenderly over me when I, a poor helpless little outcast, had been well-nigh broken-hearted for want of some one to love me; and, with the bitterest self-reproach, I cast myself into my mother's arms, exclaiming—

"Oh, Mamma! I meant not to say that of dear Aunt Mary! For *her* sake, I would do anything in the world,—

yes, even, if it could not be helped, give up Oscar! But I would rather die—for I love him so dearly—Oh! so dearly!”

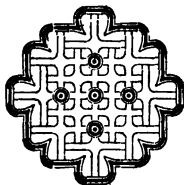
“Do you, my poor darling?” said my mother, in mournful tones; “then there is no help for it; *I* will never oppose you. But I do wish he were more calculated to make you happy,” she sighed. “I hoped you would meet with some one else, who would approach more nearly to my idea of what *your* husband ought to be. Oscar wants stability and depth of purpose; he is too easily led by appearances, and thinks too little of the moral qualities of the heart. But, as I said, darling, I will throw no obstacles in your way; only you, in your turn, must promise not to set yourself against every other person. I thought you *liked* Captain Wedgwood, for you always dance with him, and seem to take pleasure in his society; or I would at once have given a refusal, as I have already done to two other gentlemen who have applied for your hand.”

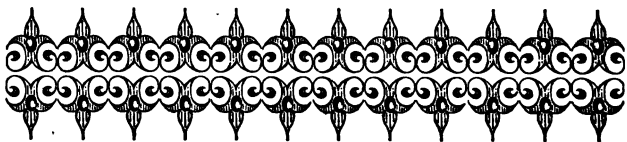
I stared. I was really ashamed of feeling so childish, while matrimonial honours were being so lavishly offered for my acceptance.

“Oh, Mamma, I like Captain Wedgwood very much; but I would not marry him for all the world! You don’t know how I love Oscar, or you would not speak to me of marrying any one but him!” I added, tearfully.

“Well, my darling, you must have your own way. Good night; and don’t cry about it, or Oscar will scold, to-morrow.”

And, tenderly kissing me, she withdrew. But I *did* cry, very bitterly; for my mother’s words respecting Oscar were but the echo of my own sad, boding thoughts, which ever rang their mournful peal upon my heart—the death-knell of my trust and hope in the future!





Fly from the town, sweet child; for health
Is happiness, and strength, and wealth.
There is a lesson in each flower
A story in each stream and bower;
On every herb on which you tread
Are written words which, rightly read,
Will lead you, from earth's fragrant sod,
To hope, and holiness, and God.

TOWN CHILD AND COUNTRY CHILD.

It was July; and the weather was intolerably hot — a close, dense atmosphere, with hardly a breeze to freshen it. How unlike our dear Rocklands, where the sea-breezes prevailed even in the hottest weather! Everything looked worn-out and faded. The streets were even dirtier than when we came; the grass (what a libel to call it by the same name with the soft velvet carpeting of Rocklands!) was withered and burnt up; the trees were covered with dust; the sheep (poor miserable apologies for cattle!) — were of a dusty black, like worn-out mourning; the sparrows — unhappy birds! presented the appearance of diminutive crows!

I longed to see the country again. It is true that I had glimpses of it in my rides, but then the *accessories* were wanting. Ah! how little do most people take into account the importance of accessories to enjoyment! They will place you in a beautiful landscape, and expect you to enjoy it *alone* — in the absence, it may be, of the one only person with whom you could exchange that sympathy which would heighten pleasure to *ecstasy*; or, worse still, in the society of coarse, uneducated minds (I allude to minds wanting in the education of *natural refinement*, which may be found in a higher degree

in the peasant than in the noble). For me, the landscape would lose half its charm in such a case. And thus it is with everything else; and so it was in my case, with respect to most London pleasures, especially in my rides, where Oscar and I were always accompanied by either the Elliots, or Minnie Ashton, or some one or other of our friends — thus losing the quiet, pleasant talks we used to have in the country. First, we would take a few turns in tame, tiresome, “show-off” Rotten Row; after which, we generally prolonged our ride for a little way into the country. Oh! it was very tedious; and I longed to return home. Not so Oscar, who, accustomed to town life, liked it, and regretted our approaching departure.

About a week before, I had received the following letter from Aunt Mary; —

“I was delighted to receive your last letter, my own Nelly, and to find that, though your first season in town has been what most young ladies would regard as a ‘triumph’ (that is to say, that you have turned the heads of all the gentlemen you have met), you are still unspoilt, and are the same dear, simple, true-hearted child, as when you left. Dear Nelly, I thought — I *knew* — you would be too sensible to allow so much flattery as you have received, to spoil you. Besides, dear, you are wise enough to know, that out of the many offers which, your mamma tells me, you have had, not *all* have been *quite* disinterested; and that, had you made your *début* as a portionless young lady, instead of as the rich Miss Dudley of Rocklands, you would not have met with half so many admirers. But I need not remind you of this. Your mamma tells me that you still persist in refusing every offer of marriage. I do not know how far you have pledged yourself to Oscar; but I must confess to my sorrow at your continued attachment, for I hoped that, when you saw other faces, you would find some one more calculated to make you happy. Sir Charles Falkner is considered a most estimable man, and his personal appearance is unexceptionable; I am only sorry you dismissed him so abruptly. Still more do I regret your rejection of Mr. Moncton, who, being a clergyman, and a good and conscientious one, would have made you, I think, very happy. Oh, Nelly! you are blind — blind! But if I preach, you will dread my letters; so I will not worry you any more, my darling. You forgot to answer my questions about Minnie. How is she looking? Whom does she dance with most, and

seem to prefer? I am very fond of Minnie, and take great interest in her; so pray answer my questions. Mr. Percival is constant in his enquiries after all of you: he still goes on in his old quiet way, visiting rich and poor, and doing good — or *trying* to do good — to all: there are few such men in the world.

“ I have a piece of news for you. Mabel is going to be married to Willie Ames, and I have engaged Phoebe in her stead — a great event in my quiet every-day life.

“ Rocklands is looking its best now, it is a thousand pities to remain suffocating in that horrid, smoky, old London! I am sitting before the open window, inhaling the soft evening breeze, which bears on its wings the balmy fragrance of the sweet flowers. The air is so clear, that I can distinguish the rippling of the brook as it winds through the orchard. Birds are singing — insects humming in their delight — and all is peace and happiness. Oh! you *must* come back soon! Think of the sand, and many-coloured pebbles, and tiny rippling waves, in your little bay! Think of the mossy paths — of the dense, impenetrable shade cast by those glorious elms — of the velvet lawn, the bright flowers, the blue sky, the song of the pure happy birds; — and come back — come back to Rocklands!

“ I am glad to hear, that little Edie is so amused with the sights, and that she has found so many kind friends and little playmates. I laughed heartily when you mentioned that Lady L—— had begged your mamma to leave the child with her for another fortnight; I would have given much to have seen your mamma's face when the proposition was made to her. Lady L—— seems to have taken a great fancy to you — I suppose, on account of your relationship to her through your first mother. I shall be glad to make her acquaintance, for I hear that she and her husband are to form part of the household of visitors whom you expect in the autumn. What gay doings we shall have!

“ Your uncle does not seem dull. Some gentlemen came to Rocklands from London to visit him; but they are now gone. Tell Edie that her white cat is quite well, and is now lying on a soft cushion at my feet. Your little bullfinch is piping in his very best style just over my head; for though puss has been taught, you say, to respect him as sacred, I think it best never to put temptation in his way, and have therefore hung up the cage in the window.

"And now I will say goodbye to my darling Nelly. Believe me, as ever,

"Your affectionate aunt,

"MARY."

The last tiresome round of farewell visits to the most intimate of our friends had been paid; the last of the interminable P. P. C. cards had been sent; the last of the endless invitations had been declined: and we lay down to rest, thinking with joy, half mingled with regret (for we were leaving many kind friends behind), that we were going back to Rocklands.

The next morning, what strapping of boxes, and running up and down stairs, and to and fro, on the part of myself and Edith! What peeping into every nook and corner, lest some treasure should be left behind! The carriage was at the door — my mother stepped in, and Edith followed: I lingered behind, for Oscar was saying farewell.

One more clasp of the hands. "Goodbye — God bless you, Nelly! I shall soon follow!" from Oscar — and I was in the carriage, and we were off.





And now there passed a portion of my time
In ease delicious, and in joy sublime —
With friends endear'd by kindness — with delight, —
In all that could the feeling mind excite,
Or please, excited; walks in every place
Where we could pleasure find and beauty trace,
Or views at night, where on the rocky steep
Shines the full moon, or glitters on the deep.

CRABBE.

How delightful were those three weeks after our return home! What pleasant walks, and rides, and drives! During Oscar's absence, my mother had begged that Mr. Percival would sometimes accompany Edith and myself in our equestrian expeditions; and we then used to have pleasant, quiet talks, which dwelt in my memory long after dear Rocklands had become part of the "long ago." How I wished that Oscar would sometimes talk to me, as Mr. Percival did, on subjects higher and better than every-day persons and things—the mere *externals* of life. He dwelt much and often upon the one great purpose of our existence, namely, that of contributing our mite towards the great design of creation—the glory of God. He spoke of the insignificance of this atom of the universe—this tiny world, yet which a God had died to save; of the vastness of creation, of the brilliant stars, the mighty heavens, the wonders of space! Often would he talk of the history of nations, with their rise and fall; or of great kings and heroes in past ages (for his knowledge was as universal as his intellect was profound): but whatever might be his theme, he always drew from it some great moral; and thus his conversation was adapted no less to the heart than to the mind.

Oscar wrote often. His letters were filled with accounts of balls, fêtes, dinners, pic-nics, in short, everything that was going on; and of complaints that I was not there to participate in such gaieties; but I was so happy, at dear, delicious Rocklands, that not even for Oscar's sake could I wish myself back in town.

At last, the Herberts were expected back; the Elliots, too, and the Ashtons, with Sir Frederic Crosier, who had accepted their offer of a seat in their carriage. During his absence, my old fears for Oscar's constancy and stability, and my regrets and vain wishes for the impossible, so far as he was concerned, had begun to return; but when I was clasped in his arms, and caught his beaming, happy smile, all my gloomy forebodings vanished. Again we wandered amidst the delicious scenery of that most enchanting place, and sat, my hand fast locked in his, in the little bay, weaving plans for the future, exchanging thoughts, revealing all our hopes and fears. One day he said to me—

"Nelly, darling, Aunt Mary has told me of all the conquests you made in town, and of the brilliant offers you refused for my sake. She said she hoped I would always be mindful of it; as if I could ever forget it, or all that I owe to you!"

Who would not have trusted that handsome, beaming face, and that clear, manly voice, which poured forth its thanks for my devotion?

"Oh! Oscar," I answered, tremblingly, "it was no sacrifice to me! I am so happy with you, that I care for nothing else; and if I could not be *your* wife, I would marry no one."

"Yet, my darling, but for me you would perhaps have accepted one of the offers your aunt told me of, eh?"

"Yes, Oscar, perhaps I might. I liked Captain Wedgwood very much indeed; and I liked Sir Charles Falkner; and, oh! I did so much like Mr. Moncton, and *he was a clergyman!* Ah! how I wish *you* were a clergyman!" And I sighed.

"Why, you tiresome little monkey!" laughed Oscar: "you will make me jealous; and I could find in my heart to be angry with you, if you did not look so provokingly pretty."

Thus days and weeks passed: the autumn came, and with it came a host of visitors, amongst the rest the L——s, who had been so kind to me and Edith. Miss L——, their only child, was a sweet creature, and was deservedly idolized by

them. On her account they proposed wintering in the south of France; for she was so delicate, that they feared each winter would be her last. They asked me to accompany them; but, in the first place, we were going to Paris, and thence to Florence, as soon as our guests should have left; and then, my mother would not have parted with me, even had I been willing to go, which I certainly was not.

We had great festivities at Rocklands and in the neighbourhood; and when the guests departed, they did so with evident regret. Then came our continental tour, after which we settled down into our old quiet ways, which I should have infinitely preferred, but for my mother's evident depression of spirits, which seemed to return as soon as she was alone with Uncle Rob, with whom she had renewed her mysterious conversations; nor could my aunt or I elicit from her any but evasive answers to our questions. Minnie Ashton and I had become great friends, and walked and talked a great deal together. She was generally in better spirits; but sometimes all her depression would return. Florence Elliot had come back disengaged, consequently not improved in temper. We were told that Blanche had refused several offers, and did not seem inclined to marry; but she and Percy were as much together as before, and people began to talk and prophecy. Nothing occurred to interrupt the even tenor of our lives, save the marriage of Willie and Mabel, which we made quite a grand affair, for the wedding-dinner was given in the servants' hall, and every face beamed with happiness.

Thus passed the autumn, and the winter had come. That, too, was passing away in a series of festivities, Oscar and I doing our best to make life a very pleasant thing, when an unexpected event occurred, which fell like a thunder-clap upon my heart. Oscar's regiment was ordered abroad—to India! When he rushed into the house to tell me this, I was so horror-stricken, that I could only gaze upon him with an intensity of anguish that alarmed him.

"Nelly! Nelly! Don't look so, my darling! My own, own Nelly, speak to me!"

For the first time, I threw my arms wildly round his neck, and clung to him as if I could have kept him with me for ever. I gasped forth—

"But you will not go, Oscar! Oscar, say you will not! You *must* not—*shall* not!"

He held me in his arms, and I felt my heart throb, almost to bursting, as he answered mournfully—

"I must—there is no escape! I *must* go! But oh! to leave you, my darling!—my treasure!—my wife!"

"But, Oscar—leave the army!—anything rather than this horrible separation! most horrible! most unnatural!" I answered shudderingly.

"Nay, dearest, that cannot be; for my father says that I have chosen my profession, and must abide by it. It is too late—too late! What cursed folly prompted me to enter the army! I must go." His voice faltered. Suddenly he exclaimed—"But why could you not go with me? We have been engaged a year and a half; you will soon be eighteen, and I twenty-two! Why on earth should we not be married? I shall not sail yet awhile, so there will be plenty of time to prepare everything. Yes, it *must* be so!" he exclaimed joyfully; "I shall go and tell your mamma directly!"

He was rushing off. I checked him.

"No, Oscar, no; it cannot be!" I interposed, sadly, but firmly; for I was regaining my self-possession. "Mamma said that we should not marry in less than three years; and I am certain that nothing would induce her to change her mind. Besides, I am too young to marry—I feel that I am; I am little better than a child."

"Nonsense, Nelly! I shall go and ask your mamma?"

And so he did; but with no better success than before. All the concession he could obtain from her was, that we should correspond unrestrainedly; and that if, at the end of a year and a half, he were unable to procure leave of absence, I should be allowed to join him in India.

Oscar going away! The thought lay like a heavy weight upon my heart—the thought that time was hastening on the inevitable day when he *must* go; and that after that, I should rise in the morning and lie down at night, as I had done before; take the same walks, and rides, and drives—but, without Oscar!—never to see him, from morning till night; but to be compelled to live on, through that long year and a half, without him! It was in vain that he tried to comfort me by saying that it was not so *very* long, and "after that, how happy we should be!" for then came the thought of leaving Aunt Mary, and little Edie, and mamma. Then he endeavoured to cheer me by suggesting that, perhaps he could

exchange into another regiment, and return home. I knew that to be a very forlorn hope, unless Major Griffiths, who was in the same regiment, did so too; for Mr. Herbert was obstinately bent on Oscar's remaining in his present regiment, because this old friend of his was in it, and he had affirmed that if Oscar left it without his consent, he might just live upon his pay, for that he should not have a shilling of his money.

No, there was no consolation, except in remembering that this trial was sent by Him without whom "not even a *sparrow* falls to the ground"; and, remembering this, I endeavoured to submit patiently to the rod. I should have felt much less anxiety if Oscar had been of a different temperament—if he had possessed more self-control—more self-denial,—and if his principles had rested on some surer foundation than the mere impulses of his good, but too impulsive and capricious heart.

"Oh, Oscar!" I said to him, when we were one day seated at the large window, surveying with deep sadness the beautiful scenes in which our youthful affection had had birth—"Oh, Oscar! it is sad, indeed, to lose you!—but sadder still, to think that you will take with you no safe-guard against the temptations which will lie in your path!"

And, leaning my head on his shoulder, I wept.

"Can you not trust me, Nelly?" he asked reproachfully.

"Oscar, I could not feel *perfect* confidence in *any one* whose principles were not based on sound religion. Nay, Oscar dear, don't be offended! I would not trust *myself*—I would not trust even Aunt Mary—without a strength greater than that of our own, weak, miserable, erring hearts!"

"Well, my darling," he answered, fondly caressing the long curls that fell upon his shoulder—"I will do anything in the world to please you—aye, even *try* to be religious!"

"Thank you, dear Oscar! and," I added, timidly stealing my arm round his neck, and looking up in his face, "I should like to make you a little present, if you would accept it, and promise to make use of it."

"I will treasure it all my life, darling; and I will value it next only to yourself!"

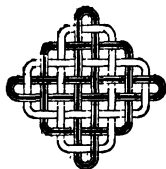
Gently disengaging myself from his arms, I ran up stairs, and soon returned with my little Bible—the companion of my childhood. Placing it in his hands, I pointed to the fly-leaf, where I had written, "Oscar—from Nelly."

"There, Oscar, I know you will value it,—at first, for my sake,—afterwards, I do hope, for its own. It has been my companion and friend through many, many dark hours; and I would not have given it to any one but you, for I love it *so* much ! Will you read it, Oscar dear !"

"I will indeed !"

He would have promised anything just then; and I should have believed him.

Oh, woman! woman! blind in your love and devotion—how little are your trust and hope governed by your reason !





When eyes are beaming
What never tongue might tell,
When tears are streaming
From their crystal cell;
When hands are link'd that dread to part,
And heart is press'd by throbbing heart;
Oh! bitter, bitter is the smart
Of them that bid farewell!—HEBER.

THE weeks flew on with terrible rapidity, and the last day had arrived. Oscar was to go on the morrow!

He was with me nearly all day; and the evening beheld us seated together in my little study. We were very quiet; my hands were fast locked in his; my head rested on his breast. The room was dark, save where the fire threw its ruddy hue around.

“Oscar, we may never meet again—never, in *this* world! I may have to bear the news of your death, and to live through life without you. But oh! let me feel that there is *another* world, where we shall meet again, never to be parted! Let me—let me meet you there!”

A convulsive pressure of the hand was his only reply; and, as I looked up in his face in the bright fire-light, I saw that a large tear was coursing heavily down his cheek! If ever he felt touched by a sense of something holier and purer than aught than this life can give, it was at that moment, as he answered, in mournful, broken accents,—

“Nelly, my own dearest sister! my best friend! I feel the value of all that I have neglected. I feel the vital necessity that there is for a sound religious faith! May God help me; for I am weak, and sorely in need of His aid! May He

incline me so to live, that when I die I may be with you, my own love, in realms where there is no parting, and no sorrow!"

The moon had risen over the tops of the elms; and, as his voice ceased, the silver rays streamed into the room, and shone in full splendour on the picture of my lost mother, illuminating the before invisible countenance, which now seemed to look down on us in holy peace and love.

"See, Oscar! she blesses us! Oh! kneel with me, and pray that we may hereafter be with her in heaven!"

And there, in the pure moonlight, we knelt before my mother's picture; and I offered up an earnest, agonised prayer, that the wanderer might be spared to return to me, or that, if we must part, God would so lead the beloved one through this world, that it would but be the passage to a better, where "sorrow and sighing are no more"—where "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest!"

My prayer was answered; and in a way I little thought!

We were silent for a long while; then, we talked more calmly, reviewing, in succession, all the scenes we had passed through.

"And Nelly, do you remember, when we were children, the party at which there was a Christmas tree; and my giving you a fruit-knife,—and your giving me the little silver coin? I have it here. I treasured it even then; for, when but a child, I loved you!"

And he drew from his breast the little silver token, which hung by a ribbon round his neck. He continued—

"I shall always wear it, dear, and when we meet again I will shew it to you."

"And I, Oscar, have kept the little knife; I need not tell you that I shall always treasure it."

"Nelly, dearest, you must write to me whenever you possibly can, and tell me of all that concerns you; everything—even the minutest trifle—will interest me."

"Yes, Oscar; and you—oh! you *will* write to me very, *very* often? You will not again fall into your old way of writing less and less frequently, as you did when you were at College? Do you remember? the last time, you wrote but once during the whole of your absence! and the two seasons when you were in town, without me, you were just as bad. Oh! Oscar, you will write *very* often?"

SELF AND SELF-SACRIFICE.

"My darling! how can you doubt it? Writing to you, and receiving your letters, will be my only happiness till — till you are my wife!"

We were silent for some time. At last, we were startled by the clock striking *Eleven*! Oscar sprang to his feet.

"Eleven o'clock! and I was to have been at home at ten! for my father wants to talk to me, as I start at six to-morrow morning. I must go!"

My heart failed me. I could only cling in despair round his neck, as he held me in a long, close embrace. By a great effort, he tore himself away, and reached the door, then turning, and opening his arms, I sprang forward, and nestled there as if all around were a frightful desert, and that, a haven of peace and security. Again he essayed to depart; but I clung to his arm, and he had not courage to put me from him.

"Nelly," he articulated, in wild and broken sentences, "my strength is failing me! If it *must* be so, I will not leave you. I will not go to India!"

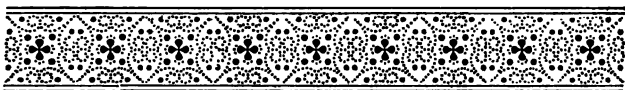
At these words, all my courage and self-possession returned.

"Oscar, I have been selfish! I am calm now. Listen. This parting will be naught—a mere trifle—if we are both true and firm. I can now look to the end of it with courage; you must do so too! God bless you, my dearest Oscar!"

One more embrace, and he was gone.

I sat listening to the sound of his retreating footsteps—my hands tightly clenched—my teeth set—a death-like chillness stealing over me. The hall door closed with a loud and startling noise; and then a presentiment came into my heart, like a chill to freeze my blood, that he was lost—lost to me—for ever!





Why, let the stricken deer go weep,
The heart ungallèd play:
For some must watch, while some must sleep;
Thus runs the world away.—HAMLET.

How I spoke, acted, or thought, for weeks after Oscar's departure, I can hardly tell; even Aunt Mary's soothing influence failed to comfort me. But at last Time did what Reason had failed to do, and I became *accustomed* to my loss. I now pursued my daily avocations as before; but my former spirit and energy had departed. Often did I leave the room, to conceal the tears which I had vainly been trying to suppress; and, when alone, I would throw myself on the sofa, where Oscar and I had exchanged our last thoughts, and there give way to an agony of grief that left me weak and powerless for the rest of the day. I had heard twice from Oscar, — once from Southampton, and once from somewhere on the voyage; and they were long letters, filled with tender anxiety for my welfare, and bitter regret at parting. How I treasured them, reading them often by day, till I knew them by heart, and placing them under my pillow at night, that I might read them again the first thing in the morning!

At last, one day, nearly a month after Oscar's departure, my aunt entered my room, where I was seated in a listless attitude, my book in my hand, but my thoughts far away.

"Nelly," she said, "I have come to consult you on a subject which has lately given me much pain. You must rouse yourself, dear child, from your own grief, which you have already indulged longer than beseems a child of God, who should try to submit, not only patiently, but *cheerfully*, to all

that her All-wise Father ordains; you must arouse yourself to console the affliction of another."

"Oh, Aunt!" I answered wearily, "*who* is in trouble? And, if so, what trial *can* be greater than mine?"

"Nelly, that is not spoken like yourself! You have grieved me! Before you sleep this night, ask God to soften your rebellious heart."

"Aunt Mary—dear, kind friend!—have I grieved you? Nay, then, I will indeed do my best to shake off this sorrow. But tell me, who can I console?"

"Your mother. Do you not see that she is borne down to the very dust by the weight of some great anxiety? An agony of dread seems to press upon her."

"My dear mother!" I exclaimed, in bitter self-reproach. "And I have been so absorbed by my own grief, that I have not even noticed hers. And she has been so good to me—oh, *so* good! She has followed me about the house with such anxious looks! Sometimes she has entered this room *so* softly, and drawn me to her arms, and let me weep there, hardly speaking, only kissing me, and sometimes saying 'Poor Nelly!' *so* sadly. Sometimes she has crept into my room at night, when she thought I was asleep, and has bent over me, and kissed me; and last night I felt her tears upon my face. Had she been my *own* mother, she could not have loved me better. Oh! Aunt dear, we must try to find out the cause of her grief, and to console her."

From this day my own trouble was quite secondary; and both I and my aunt were unremitting in our efforts to discover the source of my mother's unhappiness, but in vain; all the answer we could obtain was, that she *had* cause for uneasiness, but that she hoped it might pass away. Mr. Percival also did his best to cheer her, but with no better success; and thus the spring passed away, and the summer came. We had not spent the season in town, for we were none of us in the mood for enjoying gaiety; at least, not the gaiety of fashionable life. I had heard several times from Oscar, who was now in India; and I had written twice to him. I was now to write twice a month. In his absence, little Edith became all the world to me; and thus, what had been a tender affection, grew and strengthened into a blind and doting love—yes, I doubt if ever I loved *any one* as I did my little sister Edith. Morning, noon, and night, my one thought was to give her pleasure—to make her life one

scene of unalloyed happiness. She loved me too: no pleasure was to her perfect unless I were by to participate; and in all her little troubles and perplexities she would come straight to me, and, unfolding them, seek my advice or consolation, till even her mother would say, with a smile, that "I was spoiling little Edie." She was such a delicious child! It was not merely her extraordinary beauty that rendered her so bewitching; but there was an indefinable charm about all that she said and did, which rendered her perfectly irresistible. The graceful movements—the timid, babyish manner—the sweet, plaintive voice:—I never wearied of admiring them. So dearly did I love this child, that, whenever the thought would flash across me that I must leave her for Oscar, I repelled it with affright; I felt that, not even to join him, could I part from her.

And so, as I said, the summer had come, and we were living very quietly; for none of us could bear the idea of gaiety. And, all this time, clouds of sorrow had been slowly gathering to darken the fair horizon of all our lives—clouds black as night, heaped mountain high upon one another, and ready to burst in fury on our heads; and we knew it not. But the time had now come—the storm was at hand! And now fell upon us, like an avalanche, a blow which changed the current of our lives, and affected the destinies of all!

We were sitting on the mossy lawn—my aunt, Edith, and myself. I was weaving a garland of bright flowers for my little sister, while my aunt read to us a fairy tale, beautiful and imaginative, adapted to the comprehension and intellect of all, when suddenly my mother stood before us, pale, horror-stricken, gasping for breath.

"Read! read!" she cried, placing in my aunt's hands an open letter.

My aunt read it; and her agitation almost equalled that of my mother. Alas! there was cause enough for it. The letter was from my uncle, who had abruptly left Rocklands. It was full of remorse, real or feigned, for what he termed his "credulity in listening to the specious advice of sharpers"; and he expressed the greatest concern for his "dear sister Gert," whom, however, he left to battle alone against the ruin he had brought upon her: for she was ruined—utterly ruined—by Uncle Rob, to whom she had confided the sole management of her affairs, and who had availed himself of the unlimited

control of her very large fortune, to plunge into various speculations, all of which had proved failures. My mother's inexperience in money matters had facilitated her ruin; for though my uncle had sometimes confessed to her that *some* of the money was lost, he had kept her in ignorance of the full extent of her misfortune, which now burst upon her in all its horror.

After some time, we led her into the house, and tried our best to console her; but our efforts were unavailing.

"No," she said, in broken accents, "no; I should have remembered that I held the money in trust for you, my darling, and Edith; for your father settled nothing on either of you, saying, that he would leave it all in my power. Alas! he little knew me! And now you, my poor darlings, will have to suffer the consequences of my culpable selfishness; for I loved and trusted Robert, and could refuse him nothing." And she wept passionately.

"My dearest mamma," I interrupted, kneeling at her feet, and kissing her hands, "it may not be so bad as you think; but, even in that case, you forget that I am provided for, and that my darling Edie can live with me and Oscar, and so can you, and Aunt Mary. Oh! we shall be so happy! Now I shall be *quite* content, since, in marrying Oscar, I need not part from you."

"My own darling!" sobbed my mother, tenderly clasping me in her arms, "I do not deserve to have such a child! And when I remember, that, until you saved my little Edie's life, I treated you with a degree of harshness—"

I interrupted her:—"Nay, mamma, dearest, if you say that, I shall think that I have done something to remind you of it; besides, you forget what a naughty, perverse, passionate child I was."

She fondly smoothed down my curls, and smiled; but it was such a sad, heart-broken smile, that I burst into tears.

"Nay, this must not be," interposed Aunt Mary; "let us not add the loss of happiness to that of fortune, neither let us sit down quietly without making an effort to redeem *something* from the wreck. I shall write off by to-night's post for Mr. Selwyn to come and investigate your affairs; he is a clever, shrewd man of business, and if anything *can* be done, he is the man to do it. Come, Gertrude, let us make the best of it; and, oh! remember that this trial comes not of itself, but is

sent by Him who is perfect in wisdom as in love. At all events, my dear Gertrude, the worst has now happened; and you will no longer have to bear the terrible alternations of hope and fear which must have agitated you for some time past. Tell me now, candidly, has not your late melancholy sprung from this cause?"

"Yes, Mary; but I never imagined it would be so bad as this. Such utter ruin never entered my thoughts. Robert had often alarmed me by telling me of the loss of large sums; and I then felt distressed and agitated by doubts whether I had the right to alienate so large a portion of my children's fortune; but he assured me that he was about to enter into a speculation which would not only redeem my losses, but considerably add to my fortune."

"But, Gertrude, dear," gently remonstrated my aunt, "why did you ever enter upon these speculations at all? So unlike you, to bestow the least thought upon making money!"

"I never should have done so; but Robert engaged in them on his own account, and became involved, and I lent him money — and — and — I could never understand it, though Robert explained it to me over and over again. But it is gone — and repentance comes too late!"

And she sighed heavily; nor could we arouse her from the gloom which had taken possession of her. From that time, she sank into the most profound melancholy. Mr. Selwyn arrived, and my mother's worst fears were realised: of her large fortune, nothing remained save a very small sum, which he and Aunt Mary decided on sinking in an annuity for my mother's life-time.

At last, all was settled, and Mr. Selwyn departed; and then Aunt Mary, one morning, sat down beside my mother, and said:—

"Gertrude, we must decide what is best to be done. Will you let me manage everything?"

My mother gently inclined her head in token of assent.

"Then, first of all, the sooner you leave Rocklands (as it *must* be done) the better."

Again my mother bent her head meekly. My aunt continued:—

"We will all live together, in some place near London; it will be advantageous in many respects: and I really think

that, by joining our incomes, we may manage to live very comfortably."

"Oh, Mary! no — no! not *your* money as well! I cannot — *will* not — accept it! And to think of your leaving your pretty cottage, and your garden, which you love so much, and your poor people, who have become so fond of you! No, indeed, it shall not be!" said my mother decidedly.

"Take care, Gertrude," interposed my aunt, "take care that you do not add one fault to another. Are we not sisters? Should pride be allowed to come between *us*? Above all, are you justified in refusing for your children what you *might* have the right to reject for yourself alone? And as for all those fancied sacrifices on my part, what are they? For whom do I care in the wide world, excepting for you and the children? I tell you that it *must* and *shall* be!"

This, and much more, did my aunt say in furtherance of her plan, till at last my mother, who was no match for her, consented. So it was decided that we should take a cottage in the neighbourhood of London, make it as comfortable as our means would allow, and live there very quietly. Phœbe was to accompany us, and would be our sole attendant. My mother submitted passively to all my aunt's arrangements; and her plans were carried out so vigorously, that, within six weeks of the terrible *éclaircissement*, we were ready to depart for London. The news of our misfortune had somehow transpired; and all the neighbourhood knew *why* we were leaving Rocklands, though they affected not to. Dear, good Lady Ashton, and her sweet daughter, were unremitting in their offers of service; and I could see, by their additional kindness of manner, that their friendship had not been influenced by our position in the county.

"Oh! *what* shall we do without you?" said the gentle Minnie — her soft blue eyes filled with tears. "I shall never again have so nice a friend as Nelly!"

"But Nelly must sometimes come and stay with us, and enliven our gloom," added her kind mother.

"Will you not, dear Nelly? Come, and stay a long time — a *very* long time — *months* together — and bring large boxes full of luggage! Will you not, dear?"

I could only press Lady Ashton's hand, and *look* my thanks.

Sir Frederic Crosier came several times, and once he re-

mained a long while alone with Aunt Mary; and I noticed, after that interview, that she was sad and tearful. Then he came no more till the morning we left, when he bade us farewell at the carriage window.

Florence Elliot called, and regarded my mother with an impertinent curiosity which made me almost forget that I was a Christian. She seemed to triumph in our downfall. Turning to me, she sneeringly asked:—

“Do you mean to take Gulnare with you to town, or to sell her? If the latter, I should like to buy her.”

I could not bear this insolence, and replied, coldly:—

“I should hardly feel justified in letting you have Gulnare, for you could not manage her;—besides, I would not *sell* Gulnare. I have given her to Miss Ashton—not only because her friendship for me will make her value the gift, but because she is so splendid a horsewoman, that she will appear to great advantage when mounted.”

Florence was disappointed; she had hated me ever since I had eclipsed her in riding, and she longed to mortify me.

I asked after her brother and cousin.

“Oh!” she replied, with a scornful toss of the head, “they desired me to say that they would call to-morrow. They never go anywhere with *me* now; it’s a case of ‘two are company—three are none!’ It’s perfectly *disgusting*!” she added, with a degree of malignity that horrified me. “But it won’t go on much longer, I can tell them! I am opening mamma’s eyes, and *she* will put a stop to it! She will not allow Percy, with his fortune, to throw himself away upon a beggarly, designing girl, whom mamma took in in charity! If my brother persist, papa will disinherit him.”

“I think, Florence,” I answered, “that you are acting unkindly and wickedly. That Blanche is not designing, has been proved by her rejection of better matches than Percy would be—I mean, in a *worldly* point of view. She is *not* a ‘beggar,’ as you have the bad taste to call one brought up with you as a sister. In point of fortune she is your equal. Her education, paid for out of her own father’s money, has cost your parents *nothing*; nay, I am told that everything—even to her very board—is paid for. Therefore, she is neither ‘beggarly’ nor ‘designing’; and I must say, that I think you are animated by most ungenerous and unchristian feelings towards Blanche.”

"Dear me! what a fuss! and all because you are offended at my having supposed that you could not afford to keep a horse!"

And she took her departure.

Then, turning to my poor mother, I tried to convert the scene into a jest; but it would not do; she had felt it keenly, and that, too, more for my sake than her own.

The Herberts called; and my heart sank, and my pride was terribly humbled, as I fancied, from their manner, that their friendship was chilled by our altered circumstances. There was evidently little regret at our departure, and no invitation was given to me to stay with them. That night I passed in bitter tears; for I had relied on *their* sympathy, more than on that of all the rest.

Mr. and Miss Grayson came, and I was quite surprised to find how very agreeable they could be. Miss Grayson's manner was more than kind—it was genial; and when she said, warmly pressing my hand, that "she hoped, when I came to visit the Ashtons, I would spare a little while to her, if I could put up with their dulness and their very homely way of living,"—I was so touched that I thanked her, and, warmly pressing her hand, told her that I should be delighted; and when she said goodbye, I could not refrain from kissing her.

The good rector and his wife were profuse in their regrets, and in their offers to be of any possible use, either then, or at any future time; and when poor Mrs. Phillips wrung my mother's hand again and again before she could bring herself to say farewell, and at last did so with tears, my mother was much moved. That evening she said to my aunt:—

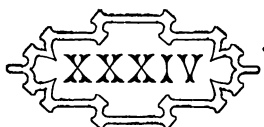
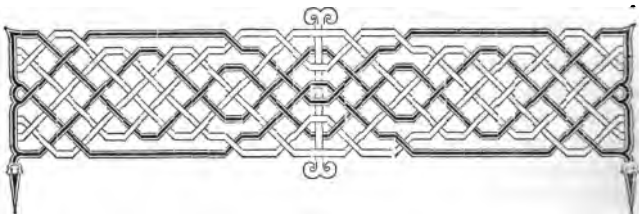
"Mary, had I my Rocklands life to begin afresh, I should choose my friends very differently. Do you remember what a horror I once had of that good, kind Mrs. Phillips? It is too late now; but I feel my injustice most deeply. And that good Miss Grayson! How often have I ridiculed her eccentricities! The shell was rough, and I saw not the priceless gem within!"

And my mother sighed deeply. She was sadly changed—utterly borne down by sorrow. I would have given much to see some trace of her old *hauteur*; but no, that was never to return, for she was crushed and broken-hearted!

It was our last day at Rocklands. When I lay down to rest, I was too weary for grief; for I had spent the day in

bidding a last farewell to all my old haunts. I had borne up bravely until I came to the little bay—the scene of many dear delights—of many happy hours passed with Oscar—of that ever memorable one, when he had first told me of his love; the very remembrance thrilled upon my heart with a mighty, overpowering strength. I knelt down and kissed the ground on which we had stood, and wept bitterly; then, gathering up a few of the tiny pebbles, I sadly turned away, and retraced my steps.





In the day of prosperity be joyful; but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.

ECCLESIASTES vii. 14.

WE are in London, — not, as before, in a splendidly furnished house in Grosvenor Street, surrounded by all the luxury that wealth commands; but in small comfortless lodgings in an unfashionable street near — yes, positively — near the Strand! However, we were not to remain there long — only until we had found a cottage to suit us.

And now began that terrible ordeal, house-hunting. We thought it would be easy to find what would suit our very humble requirements; no such thing. Some of the cottages were too small — some too large; some were at too high a rent, while others had no gardens, or else were in an unhealthy locality. In some cases, there was no conveyance into town — a point on which my aunt laid great stress. In short, we almost despaired of getting anything to suit us, though we had now been searching indefatigably every day for a month.

At last, Mr. Selwyn told us of a cottage at H —, which, he said, would exactly suit us; so, with renewed vigour, we went to explore. At the very first sight of it Edith and I went into paroxysms of delight; for it reminded us slightly of Aunt Mary's. It had a small garden in front, stocked with beautiful flowers. French windows opened on to a long verandah, that ran round the house, which was covered with vine, roses, and

jessamine. Behind, was a garden — not very large, but so arranged as to look twice its size; for it contained some fine trees, and thick shrubs, and the paths wound in and out among them. The grass was fine, and smoothly shaven, reminding us of that at Rocklands. At the end of the garden was a small orchard (like Aunt Mary's); and beyond that a meadow sloped down to the brook, which flowed noisily at the bottom. Edith and I were in ecstasies, and ran into the house, while my mother and aunt, with a view to the *practical*, were exploring. When my mother saw our glowing cheeks, and eyes sparkling with excitement, she smiled gently.

"Why, darlings — the country air has already done you good! You have more of the Rocklands look about you than you have had since we left!"

"Oh, mamma!" we exclaimed, "*do* take this cottage! it is the very thing!"

My mother shook her head doubtfully.

"Ah, dears! but the rent is higher than I should like to give! We must be prudent, you know; for though Nelly can go on without masters, Edith must still be taught, — and that is expensive."

And she sighed.

"But mamma," I argued, "*I* can teach Edie; she will learn much better from me; — Eh, Edie?"

Edith nodded.

"And it will do me good, mamma; for while I am teaching her, I shall be improving myself. Besides, I know the exact routine of her studies; if she had fresh masters, they would perhaps begin a different system, which would only unsettle her, and throw her back. You know, mamma, that my teachers said I was as able to teach French, Italian, and German, as they were; and Signor B — said as much for my singing; and Mr. Hartley for my playing; and Mr. Christie said — don't you remember? — that I could even earn a livelihood by teaching drawing. Oh, Mamma! let me teach Edith; and then you can take this delicious cottage!"

Aunt Mary seconded my petition.

"Yes, Gertrude, let Nelly teach Edith; whether we take this house or not, it will be a good thing for her."

"But," said my mother, "I am not quite sure that it will suit us. For instance, the drawing-room is perfect; but it *would* seem so odd to have to descend six steps to the dining-

room — which, by the way, is next the kitchen ! I should fancy I was actually eating my dinner in that apartment !”

“Nonsense, Gertrude ! You would fancy no such thing; and I could make that room so pretty, that even *you* would admire it; and the drawing-room, as you admit, is perfect.”

“But,” persisted my mother, “there is no breakfast-room !”

“Well — and a good thing too ! Phæbe will have quite enough to do to clean all the rooms there are. But let us look at the bed-rooms.”

So we mounted the stairs, and found just the right number, and one over.

“Now, Gertrude,” said my Aunt, gaily, “I think this house ‘just the thing,’ as the children said. I would advise you to take it; but we can hold a council of war over it to-night, and then decide.”

And we *did* decide; for when we returned to our dirty, smoky little lodgings, even my mother exclaimed —

“Oh ! what a difference !”

So she asked Mr. Selwyn to take the cottage for her; and then she and Aunt Mary set about furnishing it with the furniture from my Aunt’s cottage, and with such things as had been retained from the sale at Rocklands. Every day they went off, and remained away for hours, neither allowing us to go, nor telling us what progress they made, as they wished to surprise us; we were not to enter the cottage till we went there for good.

At last all was ready, and we were to enter into possession of our new abode on the following day. When my mother gave us this welcome intimation we were so delighted that we vented our joy in sundry shrill screams and clappings of the hands, at which my mother smiled in her gentle, subdued manner,

“Nelly, child — you will *never* be a woman ! How old are you ? Eighteen, I do believe ! and there you are jumping about with that baby, as if you were no older than she ! Ever remain thus, my darling, pure, and innocent, and single-hearted !”

And, drawing me fondly towards her, she kissed me.

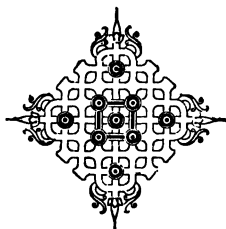
“I am *not* a baby, Mamma !” said Edith, in an offended tone, “I’m twelve; and in four years I shall be old enough to go to parties, as Nelly did !”

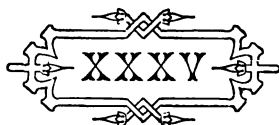
A cloud fell upon my mother’s fair brow, as she sighed

heavily, and made no answer. My aunt, who was watching her, gently kissed her, and said, in her sweet musical voice, and with her own sunny smile —

“‘Take no thought for the morrow . . . sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof’—‘Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth!’”

But my mother's sadness lasted the rest of the day.





O! days remember'd well! remember'd all!
The bitter-sweet, the honey and the gall;
Those garden rambles in the silent night,
Those trees so shady, and that moon so bright!
CRABBE.

It was a glorious afternoon in the early autumn, when we took our seat in the coach we had hired, and rattled over the stones of London. On my lap was a hamper, containing Edith's white cat, now a respectable middle-aged pussy, of grave and gentlemanly deportment. On this occasion, however, his dignity forsook him; for he kept up an incessant repetition of the monosyllable, "Mew," uttered with thrilling and prolonged emphasis on every note in the gamut. This did he do, and ceased not from the time he left the Strand till we arrived at H —, a distance of six miles. Aunt Mary held in her lap the cage containing poor Bully, who also was evidently on the verge of insanity; for he fluttered against the bars of his cage until we quitted the stones of London, when he consented to hear reason, sat upright on his perch, like a rational creature, shook himself, and looked round with a knowing air, as much as to say, "All right! don't be uneasy on my account, I beg."

At last we arrived at the cottage, and, consigning the unfortunate and demented Tibbets to the care of Phœbe, with strict injunctions to confine him in the kitchen (having previously buttered his feet), and thence on no pretence whatever to allow him to escape, we immediately rushed into the drawing-room. It was a perfect bijou. There was Aunt Mary's pretty carpet—a dark green ground, sprinkled over with roses and lilies,—and her chiffonière, with all the pretty ornaments in china and

ivory, which I used never to be tired of examining; the rose-coloured curtains, relieved by others of white lace,—the pretty rose-coloured ottoman, chairs, and sofa,—the handsome mirror over the white marble chimney-piece, on which was the beautiful French clock that I had so often admired. In the window stood a small work-table, and an easy chair for my mother. The window was open; and the fresh, sweet air came blowing in, bearing with it the delicious perfume of the flowers. In one corner of the room was my piano, which, believing that it had been sold, I had often secretly regretted. The walls of the room had been newly papered with white and gold; and the whole room was, as I have said, perfection. My mother could hardly get us away—so great was our admiration; but at last she did, and we then descended the objectionable six steps, and entered the dining-room, which was so transformed that we hardly recognised it for the same; it presented such an appearance of comfort that we pronounced it quite as enchanting as the drawing-room. But we were not to rest there. My mother, taking my hand, led me up stairs, and opened a door.

“This is your room, Nelly; I would not let even your aunt have anything to do with it: the arrangement is entirely my own.”

I gave one glance, and then clasped my arms round her neck, in mute gratitude. For there before me was the facsimile of my dear old room at Rocklands,—the same carpet, sofa, chairs, book-case;—everything, however trifling, that had been in my dear old room, had been exempted from sale, and was here arranged in exactly the same form as of old:—yes, even to the little cottage piano, on which I used sometimes to play simple, plaintive airs, before I lay down to rest. And there, over the chimney-piece, was my mother's picture! A door opened from this room into my bedroom—just as at Rocklands; and here again the same kind fairy had been at work! There was a dew in my eyes; and something in my throat prevented my speaking. My mother saw it, and, in answer to Edith's enquiries about her room, led her into one adjoining mine; a tiny apartment, which elicited Edith's extreme approval. Crossing the passage, and opening a door, my mother shewed me her own bedroom, which was very plainly furnished. How unlike the one at Rocklands! This time I found my voice; but it trembled very unpleasantly.

"Mamma, dear, I'm going to find fault with you for giving me the best room, and keeping the worst for yourself!"

"Oh! darling, it is good enough for me!" was my mother's gentle answer, as she kissed me warmly.

Aunt Mary's room was quite as simple as my mother's, and I scolded her too.

And now we descended to the cheerful drawing-room, where tea awaited us, and where Bully was hung in the window, and was evidently in frantic delight at the view of green trees, bright flowers, and blue sky. Poor bird! his London sojourn must have been a weary penance to him! Doubtless he must have imagined, if he reasoned at all on the subject (as he of course did, he being a meditative bird)—that a universal blight and greyness had fallen upon the world, and that blue sky, clear air, gay flowers, and trees, had ceased to be. Tibbets went prowling about the room, smelling into every nook and corner. After having thus peregrinated, three times, it seemed suddenly to occur to him, that the occupation, divested, after the first round, of the charm of novelty, was becoming slightly monotonous; for he walked leisurely to the window, and, seating himself in a patch of sunshine, achieved a series of ablutions: he then evidently considered that he had changed his travelling dress, and was fit to join us at table; for he walked, with a remarkably self-possessed air, to my mother's side, and there seated himself, singing what he no doubt considered an appropriate ditty, and quilting his claws in and out of the carpet, with an air of great apparent satisfaction.

How we planned and schemed all sorts of pleasures, and said, that we were determined to fancy ourselves just born, and that we had never been grand people living at Rocklands! And truly it was a pleasant life that we led there; and I was regaining all my old spirits. I heard regularly from Oscar, whose letters were all about his Indian life, which he seemed to enjoy greatly,—so much so, that he now never expressed his longing after Rocklands;—only, he constantly referred to the time when I should be with him,—for without my presence, he said, all his pleasures were incomplete.

The winter had come; and we had grown so accustomed to our pretty, graceful dwelling, that we—that is, Edith and I—seldom bestowed a thought on the past. Christmas was over; and we were one night sitting round the cheerful fire, when a

ring was heard at the door bell — a most unwonted event at that time of night.

"Phœbe," called my mother, "don't open the door till you have looked from the window, and asked who is there; the *upper* window, Phœbe!"

We all shouted with laughter, as we made a simultaneous rush upon my mother, declaring that we would drag her to the door, that she might receive the first attack of the formidable burglar, when Phœbe came running back, crying joyfully, "Oh ma'am — Miss Duddley — ma'am!" and there, behind her, was one, the sight of whom gladdened all our hearts, — Mr. Percival. After he had shaken hands with us over and over again, and Edith and I had seized upon his hat, cloak, and gloves, and carried them off, in order to ensure what we called "a long stay," he sat down; and then we all, with one accord, began to inundate him with questions.

"How are all at M——?" from my mother.

"How are all my poor people?" from my aunt.

"How is my poor little pony? And how is Amy?" from Edith.

"And how is Gulnare looking? And is Minnie Ashton well? And Blanche Elliot?" I put in.

Mr. Percival held his hands to his ears, and laughingly answered —

"I will not listen to any more questions. First and foremost — all is much the same, Mrs. Dudley, as when you left, that is, with one or two exceptions, which I shall mention in answer to Nelly's *three* queries. Your poor people are all tolerably well, Mary, though they miss you sadly; the Johnsons and Amesess are getting on capitally, and Willie and Mabel are as happy as possible. — Edie, your pony is quite well, and very fat. — Nelly, Gulnare is in splendid condition, and Miss Ashton manages her admirably; by the bye, she is often joined in her rides by Sir Frederic Crosier, and they do say — but I never attach much importance to village gossip. Poor Blanche Elliot is about to leave her uncle's house; many rumours are afloat concerning it; but I believe the true one to be, that her uncle and aunt do not approve of her engagement with Percy. I must say that I think their conduct rather inconsistent; for the young people have been allowed to be together from their very childhood, and of late years all have seen plainly what was the state of the case, and Mr. and Mrs.

Elliot seemed to approve of it. Some one must have been influencing them."

"That Florence!" I exclaimed indignantly.

Mr. Percival laughed.

"You were never very fondly attached to that young lady; and I must confess that I rather share your sentiments, Nelly. However, poor Blanche has to quit the house; and who do you think is going to receive her? No other than that good, kind Miss Grayson, than whom a better Christian never lived! Percy, who wants but a few months of being twenty-one, declares that, come what may, he will marry Blanche as soon as he is of age. His father swears that, in that case, he shall not have a penny of his money; but, as Percy will then come into a little legacy of two hundred a year, and as Blanche has a hundred a year of her own, they can manage to live, and Percy must try for some employment to increase his income. He declares that his parents' harshness to Blanche has but strengthened his affection for her, and that he now feels himself impelled to marry her, no less in honour than from inclination. And so, that is all the news of the village; and now I must be going, for it is getting late. I have a bed at the inn. Good-night to you all."

Every day he came, and stayed at our entreaty all day long; and when, at the end of the week, he departed, to his evident sorrow, we all felt as if we had lost Rocklands over again. A week after his departure, my mother received from him the following letter.

"Dear Mrs. Dudley,

"You will laugh, and so will you all, when I tell you of the folly I have committed. Hearing that the Granges, who bought Edith's pony, were going abroad, and therefore wished to part with it, I thought I would just go and have a look at the poor fellow. As I stood leaning against the fence of the paddock in which he was grazing, I just called him by his name, and the poor fellow knew me, and, trotting up to where I stood, rubbed his nose against my sleeve, and looked so wistfully at me, that I actually stooped down, and kissed his dear old forehead. I felt reminded of the old beloved time at Rocklands, when Nelly, a bright-eyed, happy child, took her first ride on poor Bob; and I could not bear the thought of his passing into strange hands: so, in

short, I bought him. And now that I have him, I don't know what on earth to do with him, so I am going to pack him off to you; he will graze capitally in the field, and it will be nice exercise for the children to ride him; and it will comfort poor Nelly's heart to have one thing more that was at Rocklands. Let me know when you have received poor Bob, and how he has borne the journey. Farewell, my dear friend. My love to all. Believe me, most sincerely yours,

“REGINALD PERCIVAL.”

“P.S. Blanche Elliot is with Miss Grayson. God bless her for her kindness to the poor orphan!”

My mother's voice had quivered through this letter; and when it was concluded, we were all too much moved to make any comment. At last she spoke, with earnest accent and tearful eyes.

“Nelly, you must write and thank him for this kindness, so delicately offered. It will be some time before he will be able to make up the sum which this effort to gratify you has cost him; and he will have to deny himself many comforts:—for I know him well—his *poor* will not suffer by it! Oh! Nelly, he has a good, generous, unselfish heart—a noble intellect!”

“Yes, mamma; he is the best man I have ever met; and I love him—next to you, and aunt, and Edith—better than any one else.”

“Do you, dear? Better than——?”

She hesitated. I blushed.

“No, mamma; Oscar, of course, is separate, in my mind; from all the world.”

My mother sighed and fell into deep thought.

A week after, the pony arrived; and Edith and I led him to the field, where he seemed mad with delight, and, tossing his head in the air, galloped about in ecstasy. That evening I sat down to my little desk (the same which had emanated from the wonderful box), and commenced an epistle to Mr. Percival. I sat for some time with my chin resting on my hands.

“Well, Nelly, what are you thinking about?” said my aunt.

“I don't know how to begin, aunt.”

“Begin ‘Dear Mr. Percival,’ ” prompted my mother.

"No, mamma; I am afraid that would look as if I fancied myself his equal in age, and intellect, and everything."

"Say, 'Thank you, my kind friend, for——' and so on," said my aunt.

"No, aunt; that also would be too presuming."

Little Edie now put in her oar.

"I should say, 'You are a dear, darling, good old thing, to send me poor Bob! Yours, most affectionately, Nelly.' That would do very nicely, and would soon be written; and then you could finish my new frock, and I could wear it to Church on Sunday."

We all laughed at Edie's notion of the epistolary; and I laid down my pen, saying—

"I don't think I am in a writing mood to-night—at least, not now. I will go on with Edie's frock, and write presently, in my room, where I may feel more inspired."

And so I did; and the result was the following epistle:—

"DEAR SIR,

"I should not have written to you, had not mamma said, that, as you sent the pony partly on my account, I ought to write and thank you. I am sure that you did not expect me to do so, and I fear you will think me presuming; but mamma *would* have me write. How very, very kind of you, to send poor Bob! He was indeed the most acceptable present you could have made us. Often have I thought of him, and wished that we had him here, grazing in the pretty meadow. I cried—do you know—when I said goodbye to him at Rocklands; for I thought I should never see his dear old face again—and I was very fond of him. I was *proud* of Gulnare, and fond of her, too; but I *loved* poor Bob, who had carried me for so many years, and who would run to me when I entered his box, and rub his head against my shoulder, and lick my hand. Thank you, again and again, for giving me back my old friend. Edith joins me in thanks, and desires me to say that *she*, too, would write, but that she fears she might make some mistakes (little dunce!). I shall ask mamma to write you a *large* letter, and to enclose mine in it, for I am sure you would not be satisfied with my letter only; and, *indeed*, I should never have written of my own accord. We miss you so much! It is like losing Rocklands over again.

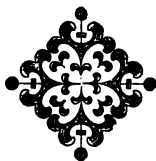
When you next visit us, you will see Bob in his new home. I forgot to tell you, that there is a little stable, which just does for him to sleep in. It was indeed kind of you to send him; it has made me *so* happy!

“ Believe me, dear Sir,

“ Sincerely and gratefully yours,

“ NELLY.”

When I shewed my mother this letter, she said that it would do very nicely— only, she objected to the “ Dear Sir”; but as I would not substitute any other title, she was obliged to yield that point: and the letter, enclosed in hers, was sent.





When shall my soul, in silent peace,
Resign life's joyless day;
My weary heart its throbbings cease,
Cold mouldering in the clay?
No fear more, no tear more,
To stain my lifeless face;
Enclasped, and grasped
Within thy cold embrace.—BURNS.

My time now passed very rapidly; for, besides having to teach Edith, pursue my own studies, and take a necessary amount of exercise every day, I was milliner in ordinary to the family. My aunt, aided by me when I had time, did most of the plain work; whilst I manufactured dresses, bonnets, cloaks, etc. — and that, too, with such success, that no one ever suspected *me* to be the architect of those marvellous structures. Had I not been so incessantly occupied, I believe that I should not have been so happy as I was; for I had two causes for uneasiness. In the first place, Oscar's letters came less frequently: he said that his "military duties" prevented his writing as often as he could wish; but, as he nevertheless expected to hear from me as before, I still wrote twice a month. His letters were filled with accounts of all sorts of amusements; and the thought for a moment flashed across me, that, if I were in his place, I should now and then give up a ball, or a dinner, and devote the time thus saved to writing the letter that was so anxiously expected in England; but the next moment I banished it, saying to myself, "Why, Nelly, you are getting more selfish than ever! Is not Oscar all that you can possibly wish — generous, devoted, and true-hearted? For shame,

Nelly!" My other cause of anxiety sprang from my mother's unabated depression of spirits, which, I now feared, began to prey upon her health. She was very pale, and I now and then fancied that she was in pain; and if anything happened to startle her in the least, she would press her hand to her side, and draw a heavy sigh. I spoke of it to Aunt Mary, who agreed with me that she was evidently suffering.

One Sunday, we were all standing in church, while the organ was pealing forth a glorious *Te Deum*, when my mother suddenly caught at the front of the pew, and fell fainting to the ground. We bore her into the air, and, after a while, she revived, and we took her home. We laid her on the sofa; and then my aunt, drawing me aside, whispered, "I am going for the doctor, Nelly; I do not like her symptoms. Keep her quiet. I shall soon be back."

Placing a low stool beside the couch, I sat down by my mother, who, intensely pale, and very weak, had closed her eyes. I held her hand—her dear little white hand—and tried to restrain the tears which were forcing themselves through my lashes. She gently put her arm round my neck.

"Nelly, my own sweet child, you have been my comfort, my support, the joy of my life! I cannot thank you as I would, for the light that you have thrown upon my path! Will you read to me, my darling, from the holy book, which has been your guide, and which, aided by your example, has been my comfort and my salvation?"

"Where would you like me to read, dear mamma?"

"The twenty-third Psalm."

I did so; but when I came to the words, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me,"—my voice gave way, and I burst into an agony of tears; for I felt *why* she had chosen that Psalm. Soon, however, I became composed, and still holding the little hand, and from time to time pressing it to my lips, I sat there in silence. I had sent Edith into the garden to learn her collect, so that we were undisturbed.

After a while, my aunt returned with the doctor, who looked grave, and wrote a prescription, promising to call again on the morrow. Before leaving, he said to my aunt:—

"You can't keep her too quiet. Long walks must be avoided. She should take exercise in a pony-chaise, or in a

garden-chair. The fresh air will be beneficial, if it can be enjoyed without fatigue."

"She shall," was my aunt's brief reply.

When he was gone, my mother gently reproached my aunt for incurring what she considered the needless expense of a doctor.

"Why, Gertrude, dearest," answered Aunt Mary, with a melancholy attempt at cheerfulness, "to hear you talk, one would fancy we were on the verge of bankruptcy! You don't know how well off we are! Not only can we afford a doctor, but a pony chaise—think of that! Bob can draw it, and Nelly can drive. Think—a nice little low chaise, to hold two!"

My mother, whose extreme ignorance of money matters made her yield implicit credence to all that my aunt said concerning them, gently acquiesced; but I, better informed, wondered how Aunt Mary could possibly manage to pay even the doctor, should his bill be a heavy one; and as to buying a carriage, it seemed downright insanity. However, within a week, it did actually make its appearance; and then Bob was harnessed in it, and I first of all drove him up and down the road, to give my mother confidence. After that, we had many pleasant drives together; but I could not enjoy them, for I saw that though they did my mother good at the time, there was no improvement in her general health; and I felt, with agony, that her disease was beyond the leech's skill.

Can'st thou not minister to a mind diseased?
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow!

Sorrow and self-reproach for her share in what she thought our ruined prospects were fast rooted in that broken heart, and were slowly, but surely, doing their work. All our care and love could but retard for a few weeks the march of the fell destroyer, and smooth the downward path of the gentle sufferer; they could not heal the broken heart, nor keep her with us here; and my aunt and I beheld with anguish that she was rapidly becoming worse. I was her chief attendant; for my aunt went to town every day, and was absent for some hours: when she returned, she looked harassed and careworn, but never gave a satisfactory account of where she had been—only, sometimes I thought she had been shopping, for she frequently returned with expensive

delicacies for my mother. Where the money came from, I could not imagine; and whenever I asked her, she would say, with a smile, that "she was Mother Goose, and had found the bird that laid the golden egg!" At last I said to her:—

"Well then, aunt, I wish it would lay its eggs here; for you are wearing yourself out by seeking them every day! You will soon be as weak as poor mamma. Do send *me*, sometimes, for the things that are wanted!"

"Oh no, dear! You would not understand buying them. Besides, I sometimes call on people; and you could not do that for me, you know!"

And now, my mother was growing weaker and weaker, and could no longer bear even the motion of the carriage. We used to draw her sofa to the window; and she would lie there, looking peaceful and contented, watching the budding leaves and flowers, and listening to the blithe carol of the birds— for it was spring. One evening she called me and Aunt Mary to her side.

"Nelly, dearest, when I have left you — (nay, my child, it must have happened sooner or later, — and it is the will of God; I do but go away a little sooner than you expected) — when I have left you, think of me as of your *own* mother — not the harsh step-mother who embittered your childish years! Ah! I *must* speak; for it has been on my mind so long — pressing, weighing — here — *here!*" and she clasped her hands upon her heart.

"Mamma, mamma, I must and will speak! If you could read my heart, you would know how dearly I love you, and how impossible I have felt it, to repay, even in the poorest manner, your great, great kindness to me! To my unknown mother I owe my birth alone; to you, I owe far more. Have you not for years made me the subject of your most anxious solicitude? Have you not bestowed on me even more care and pains than on your own little darling child? Could my first mother have done more for me? Can I be sure that she would even have done so much? For I have never yet met with any one whose real parents have done as much for her, as you have done for me! And as for what you call your harshness to me when I was a child, I richly deserved all the correction I met with; for I was passionate and headstrong, and had it not been for Aunt Mary's guidance, I should have been unbearable! Ah! my own dearest mother — your love

has made this earth a Paradise to me! and if you *must* go—" I struggled for self-possession—"if you *must* go, would that I could follow you, for my life will be desolate indeed!"

"Nelly, darling, you are unjust to yourself. You had no faults but such as are common to children; but I disliked you for a reason which you will soon know. When I am gone, Aunt Mary will give you your mother's letters — (you know where they are, Mary)—and she will relate to you my early history; you will then know *why* I treated you so unkindly. Nelly, pride was my bane! I possessed a haughty, unyielding spirit, which entailed upon me much misery, and alienated me from one who was to me a sister. That friend was your dear mother, whom I humbly trust to meet again, where hatred and ill-will are never known. Thank God! I have seen my error in time! My pride is broken at last—my heart, too!"

"Mamma! mamma! you *must* not speak more! How pale you are. Dearest mamma, rest—close your eyes: or, if you will not sleep, hear me. You are bestowing so much thought on your eldest child, that you are forgetting your little Edie. When you are gone, it shall be my care never to let her suffer by your loss,—to study her interests before my own,—to ensure her comfort and happiness in life,—to do all for her that you have done for me! It will be but a poor and faint return for all your love and kindness. And now sleep, my dearest mother; for you look faint and weary."

She closed her eyes; and as I sat beside her, listening to the short, irregular breathing, I thought over her words and my own, and vowed solemnly to keep the promise thus given to one just entering within the portals of the grave.

Presently, little Edith entered, with a basket of violets; and I motioned to her to sit down at my feet, and keep quiet. Soon after, my mother awoke, and Edie sprang to her arms, saying,—

"Look, mamma! look at these pretty flowers! I have picked them for you. Do get well soon; for I want you to come out with me again, as you used to do."

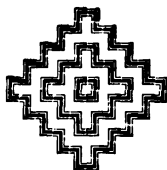
"My darling," answered my mother, languidly, "I shall never again walk with you in the pleasant fields; for I am going, I trust, to Heaven! Oh! my darling, try so to live in this world, that you will join me in the next! Nay, do not cry, my pet! Nelly will be your mamma, and will teach you

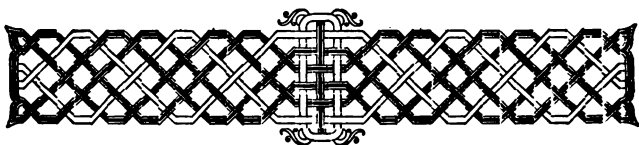
to be good. "Nelly," she added, "turning to me, and speaking slowly and solemnly, "I charge you to think more of this child's *eternal*, than of her *temporal* welfare! Oh, Nelly! feed her poor starving soul!"

"With God's help, I will!"

Another week had passed; and silence reigned around us, broken only by the sobs of the little orphan, Edith, who clung to her mother's hand. The poor sufferer was at rest — her head pillowed on my shoulder.

The Spirit was in Heaven!





My soul grows sad with troubles.
HENRY THE EIGHTH.

MONTHS had passed; and still we went softly about the house, and spoke in hushed accents. Each day, my little sister and I took a basket of fresh and beautiful flowers, to strew upon the quiet resting-place; and while we sat there, in the solemn presence of the dead, I read to her from the Book of God, and tried to awaken in her young, untaught soul, feelings which had so long lain dormant, that, at first, they seemed well-nigh extinct. I was aided in my task by Mr. Percival, who came up for a week, and talked much with me.

"The child's moral culture," he said, "has been fearfully neglected; and your task, Nelly, will be no easy one: but you must not be discouraged, for Edith possesses a soft, ductile nature, and, I can see, receives impressions from all around her. Hers will never be a very *strong* character; yet I hope, that, with care, she may grow into an amiable woman, and a sincere Christian. My poor child!" he added, "what a change is this from your former brilliant existence!"

"Oh!" I answered, with a smile, "my butterfly existence is past; and I must now be content to remain a sober brown moth, for the rest of my life! Much gaiety was distasteful to me — I mean, the gaiety of town, in the season; I often felt it terribly irksome. At *Rocklands*, it was very different! But," I added, checking the sigh which the memory of my dear old home had called forth, "but I should be very happy here, if *she* were with me, and if —"

I stopped abruptly; for Mr. Percival knew not of my engagement with Oscar.

"If what? my child."

"Oh! nothing — nothing," I answered, and then changed the subject.

When Mr. Percival left, we missed him even more than we had done the first time, — I, most of all, for I had learnt to rely upon him, more than upon any one. My aunt was now from home the greater part of the day; and I feared that she was fatiguing herself by walking too far, for she was looking pale and languid, and had a constant cough.

"Dear Aunt," I one day said to her, "I am *sure* I can go to town instead of you!"

"No, Nelly, you cannot; very often I am collecting money from different places, and you would not be able to get it. Your poor mamma's income ceased with her life; therefore, I am obliged to be very careful indeed about money."

That night, I conceived a plan, which I very soon put into execution. Within a month I was engaged to teach drawing in two families, and had to go to town twice a week for that purpose; I was also in hopes of being able to procure pupils in music and languages. Then I managed, in my spare time, to paint pictures for sale; and thus, though my profits were not very large, I was able to add *something* to the general fund.

And now, despite my incessant occupation, I was becoming seriously unhappy; for I had not heard from Oscar for more than four months, and I felt terribly alarmed lest illness should have prevented his writing; but I said nothing to my aunt, for she had anxiety enough already. In the midst of all my sorrow, my little sister was an unspeakable source of happiness to me; and my love for her was being amply rewarded by her improvement. She now made efforts to shake off her besetting sins — vanity and selfishness; and her heart was gradually opening to receive the truths of religion. Hers was a sweet, gentle, pliant nature — *too* gentle and unstable to be trusted alone in the journey of life; but I hoped that in time and with diligent culture, the good seed would become so firmly rooted in her heart that nothing would be able to eradicate it.

And now occurred one of those incidents which many people designate *chances*, not remembering that there is no such thing as *chance*, but that all — even the most trivial occur-

rence — is ordered by the Most High; but it was one which, though, to a common observer, apparently trifling, teemed with momentous consequences.

Arriving one day in town a little before my time, I turned into a shop to make some necessary purchase. A lady, in deep mourning, was seated there, with her back towards me; and I thought I recognised her voice. Nor was I mistaken; it was Lady L —, but so changed — so borne down by sorrow did she appear, that I should hardly have known her, had she not advanced, and, taking both my hands in hers, affectionately kissed me.

“Dear Nelly! how glad I am to see you! We heard of all your troubles, and of your sad loss — poor child! but we did not know where you had settled. This is the happiest moment I have had for a long time; for you knew poor Kate, and she was very fond of you.”

“Oh! dear Lady L —, then you have lost her!”

And my eyes filled with tears at the sight of the poor quivering lips which vainly essayed a reply. As I was obliged to leave, I gave her our address, and she promised to call on the morrow. After this, we saw much of her; and she frequently took us for drives, or to spend the day with her. The latter I was seldom able to do, but Edith went very frequently; for though such visits interfered, to a certain extent, with her studies, and tended to imbue her with a love of excitement which I had lately been trying to check, I had not the heart to immure the poor child in the solitary house, and to deny her the only distraction within her reach.

I was now becoming terribly anxious about Aunt Mary, whose languor had increased to such an alarming extent, that frequently, on entering the house, she would throw herself on the sofa in a state of utter exhaustion; and her cough had increased in violence.

One evening she returned thus, and after a terrible fit of coughing, closed her eyes and sank into a disturbed sleep. Anxiously I bent over her, and marked, with anguish, the change that had taken place within the last few months. The fair, transparent skin was yet fairer and more transparent than before; but the small delicate features had become sharpened and attenuated, and there was a deep shadow under the eyes. As I marked the feverish glow that burnt upon her cheek, and listened to the short, irregular breathing, my

resolution was taken;—Aunt Mary should no more go out unaccompanied by me! A sudden fit of coughing awoke her; and, as the handkerchief which she had pressed to her lips fell to the ground, I stooped to pick it up, and as I did so, beheld a sight which filled me with horror. It was stained with blood! For the first moment or two I felt stupified; then, holding it before her, I almost shrieked —

“Look! Look! You knew of this, and concealed it from me! And you have had the heart—no, no, the unutterable barbarity!—to neglect your health till it has come to this! And *I* have allowed it! *I* who pretended to love you more than all the world! Oh! of what worth is my affection, if it cannot even watch over the health of the beloved one! And now it is too late! But no, it cannot—*shall* not be! Anything else I could bear; but not this—Oh, not this! I will not—*will* not bear it; or, if you *must* die, *I* will not live! Yet, oh my God! pardon my rebellion! But oh! not this—not *this* stroke!”

“Nay, my child”; and the low, trembling accents fell with inexpressible pathos on my ear. “Nay, my dearest Nelly; if it be the will of God, you *must* submit! But my case may not be so hopeless as you think; only, several of my family have died in a decline, and you know, Dr. S—— always predicted that mine would not be a long life. God, in His mercy, has spared me much longer than I expected, and has enabled me to complete the work that lay before me. I shall die happy, since I know that my dear child is clad with that strong armour which alone can preserve her in the Great Battle!”

And, laying her hands upon my head, she imprinted a long fervent kiss upon my forehead.

“Oh! don’t talk as if you were going to die! No, no, you *may* recover! But Aunt, tell me—you *must*—you *shall*!—what has been your object in spending every day, for the last few months, in town?”

She hesitated. A deep flush overspread her face, and her eyes were cast down.

“Nay, Aunt—you *shall* tell me!”

“I have been trying to earn money.”

“How?” I spoke shortly and sternly.

“By teaching.”

“Teaching what?”

"Oh, Nelly! I cannot bear this tone from *you*. Kiss me, my child; for I am very weak, and sorely in need of all your love and tenderness."

I clung round her neck, and wept long and passionately.

"Now tell me, my dear, dear friend—my second mother—now tell me, and I will bear it."

"I have been teaching the piano, and—and singing."

"Singing!—and with that cough! Oh, my God!" I fell upon my knees, "spare her, even yet, if it be possible—all things are possible with Thee! Oh! spare her, and take from me all else!"

"Nay, Nelly, dear one; if it must be so, you will learn to submit: for God never inflicts a blow without giving us strength to bear it. Besides, life is so short, that you will soon follow me, and then we shall *all* be re-united. But you have still much to care for in this world; before long you will be, I trust, a happy wife. Tell me, darling, has Oscar yet written to remind you of your promise? The year and a half has more than expired; and I have deferred lying-by, in the hope that he would have a comfortable home to offer you when I should be unable to work any longer for your support."

"Oh, Aunt!" I exclaimed reproachfully, disregarding her question, "and I remember that Dr. S—— said, that, though you were so delicate, you might enjoy a long life if you did not over-task your strength. Above all, he prohibited your singing whenever you had the slightest tendency to a cough."

And again I gave way to an agony of tears.

"But tell me, Nelly, when did you hear last from Oscar?"

"I have not heard from him for months," I replied, sorrowfully, and with a deep blush. "At first he wrote constantly, as you know. After that his letters were less frequent; he said his military duties interfered with his writing. Then two months elapsed; then three; and now I have not heard from him for months."

And I turned away my face, to conceal the large tears which were gathering and would have their way.

"Nelly, at the risk of offending you——"

"Oh! Aunt, '*offending*'! and at *such* a time!"

"Well then, dearest, at the risk of grieving you most deeply, I must say what is in my thoughts. Mark my words! Oscar is unworthy of you, and you have misplaced your affec-

tion. Yes, my child, weep bitterly; better to weep now than hereafter, when it will be too late. His 'military duties!'—she spoke in deep indignation—"Do they prevent his enjoying all the gaieties and pleasures that fall in his way? Are you blind, Nelly? Do you not see that his shallow nature is incapable of the affection which endures through years, and absence, and tribulation? He might render happy one as fickle and inconstant as himself; but not *you*, Nelly—not such as *you*! And even if you become his wife—which, I fervently trust and believe, you never will—you will not be happy!"

Alas! I felt in my inmost heart that her words were true; but I had so long been accustomed to cling to Oscar, that I felt that, worthy or unworthy, I must do so still.

And there I sat, pondering my aunt's words, feeling their truth, and yet resolved to continue to act without reason. I was a moral coward. Soon, however, my thoughts took another direction, and reverted to poor Aunt Mary. I saw that but one course lay before me—to confess that *I* also had been turning my talents to account, to make her give me a list of her pupils, and to induce them to accept my services in lieu of hers. She was at first inflexible, but at last yielded, on condition that the care of Edith's education should be transferred to her, to which I readily consented, mentally resolving that Edith should spend more time than ever with kind Lady L——, and that I would so plan and arrange her lessons, that the greater part of them should be got over before my departure each morning; and, as the doctor approved of it, saying that it could not possibly injure her, but might, on the contrary, be a little distraction to her mind, there could be no objection.

One evening, as, weary and spiritless, I entered the little drawing-room, and advanced to warm my frozen hands at the glowing fire (for it was winter), I found a visitor, whom I at first took for Mr. Percival, seated with my aunt. I had just exclaimed, in joyous accents, "Mr. Percival! I am *so* glad!" when the stranger advanced abruptly, and seizing my hands, drew me into the full glow of the fire.

"I cannot well see her, Mary. Do let me ring for lights," was spoken by a voice that was not Mr. Percival's; and my aunt relieved my astonishment, by saying—

"Your Uncle George, Nelly—your first mother's only brother."

Lights were now brought; and, holding me at arm's length, he gazed upon me earnestly, and then drew me to his heart, saying, in mournful accents:

"Like poor Eleanor, in face, form, accent!—just like her!"

I gazed upon my new uncle with a strange feeling—a sort of awe, mingled with affection. He had a fine, intellectual countenance, which seemed not altogether strange to me; and as I continued to gaze on him, I found that his face was indeed familiar to me, in its wonderful resemblance to my mother's portrait, only that it was marked with the lines of sorrow, and the hair was thinly streaked with grey.

"Nelly," he said, still holding my hands, "I hope that you do not think *all* uncles resemble your Uncle Rob, do you?"

"No, indeed," I answered, half laughing, half in earnest; "Uncle Rob was no great favourite of mine."

"I met him," he continued, "in America, and it was from him that I heard of all your trials; so, as soon as I could settle my affairs, I came to England, where I had some trouble in finding you out. I did wrong—*very* wrong—in losing sight of my sister's child; but it was all Aunt Mary's fault."

This was uttered laughingly; but my aunt, holding up her finger, said, in a warning tone—

"Hush, George!"

Then, my aunt and he had much to talk of, all about old times, and dear, long-lost friends; and, after that, he turned to us, and told us wonderful stories of all that he had seen and done in the New World, till he made Edith's hair stand on end; and the child, who was still as timid and shrinking as when she was a baby, crept up to me, and held my hand firmly; but still she fixed her large, earnest eyes on Uncle George, and, whenever he paused in his recital, pleaded—

"Oh! go on telling, please; it's so nice."

We had my poor mother's room prepared for him, and fully thought that he would have taken up his abode with us, but he left us within a fortnight after his arrival; and, the night before his departure, I was unintentionally witness of a scene which opened to me a page of my aunt's past history.

I had had a fatiguing day, and was resting on a sofa, in a dark corner of the room. The lights had not been brought in; and the neglected fire had burnt so low, that the faint glare which it threw around was insufficient to render me, in my sable habiliments, visible. While I lay thus, Uncle George, who had

been despatched by my aunt on some errand to the village, entered the room, and my aunt followed almost immediately to ask about the commission with which she had entrusted him.

"Oh! never mind that now, Mary. I have been wanting to speak to you alone — and I will. Mary, this is no life for you; you must change it. Give *me* the right to work for you. Oh! be my wife!"

At the commencement of this speech I had moved, to let them know I was there, but they heard it not; and now I thought it best to keep quiet, as the discovery of my presence would be painful to both. He had taken her hands, and was speaking with vehement, rapid utterance.

"Oh, Mary! for the love of Heaven, do not refuse! Let not pride still raise its insensate barrier between us! You loved me once; and though we were then too impetuous to know what was for our happiness, it is no longer so! You are so gentle and reasonable, that you cannot cherish ill-will for the past! Mary, through all these long years of banishment I have thought of you — yes, thought with regret, bordering on frenzy, of the false pride which separated us; and now I tell you, that my love for you is still as fresh and pure as when, a young, impulsive boy, I swore to you, beside the little stream in the pleasant valley, that none but you should be my wife. I have kept my vow, Mary, not because I thought it irrevocable in the sight of God, but because no woman whom I have since met has been able to drive you from my heart. Oh, Mary! answer me!"

She did; and her trembling broken voice betrayed the anguish of her soul.

"Too late! too late, George! It may not be; for the grave is even now opening to receive me! Yet have I ever loved you, and thought with saddened memory upon the happy, happy time, when I was your affianced bride. The clinging memory of that loved time has steeled my heart against all others!"

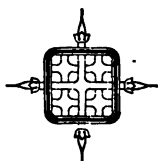
He would not take her first refusal, but urged every argument to turn her from her resolution. At last, with a deep sigh, he abruptly left, after kissing her hands, and uttering a fervent — "God bless you, Mary! You may be right; but I cannot see it now, for the dream of a lifetime has been crushed!"

And when she was alone, she buried her face in her hands, and sobbed despairingly.

Was that my gentle, unimpassioned Aunt Mary? Ah! we have all of us *some* moments of passion — and this had been the dream of *her* lifetime, as of his!

The next morning, my uncle did not appear at the breakfast table; and, on entering his room, we found that the bed had not been slept in that night.

“He will not return!” said Aunt Mary.





Passions are the gales of life; it should be our care to see that they rise not into a tempest.

AFTER my uncle's departure, Aunt Mary became rapidly worse; and nothing that we could do availed to check the progress of her disease. We were sitting, one Sunday afternoon, round the fire, my aunt stretched on the couch, which she now rarely left. I had been reading the Bible to her; and when I had concluded, we were silent for some time. At last she spoke;—

“Nelly, I may not be with you much longer, nor may I again feel so well as I do to-day. I will therefore relate to you what you do not know of the lives of your first and second mothers.

“I and my brother were brought up, as you know, by my grandmamma, Lady Dudley; and all the luxuries and refinements that wealth could bestow were freely lavished upon us by this only surviving relative, whose doting affection for both of us, but especially for myself, was almost incredible. Under her care I grew up proud and imperious, exacting all, and yielding nothing; to *her* alone was I submissive. Studying my interests in all things, she adopted your mother, Eleanor Middleton, and Gertrude Willoughby, the orphan daughter of a friend, in order that I might have the society of girls of my own age, and be educated with them. Eleanor was of the same age as myself; Gertrude, four years younger. Thus Eleanor became my friend and inseparable companion, while we both regarded Gertrude as a child, to be petted and spoilt. Later, however, a strong friendship sprang up between Eleanor

and Gertrude, and it lasted until the time of your mother's marriage.

"It was a happy life that we led—we three young things—spending the seasons in town, and the rest of the year either at my grandmother's enchanting country seat, or abroad. As we grew up, my brother formed an attachment for Gertrude, and they became engaged—she yielding up her whole affection, with all the ardour of her young, impetuous nature. They both erred, in concealing this engagement from my mother. Arthur was most to blame; for, knowing that Lady Dudley wished him to form an advantageous alliance, he feared that she might not approve of his union with the portionless Gertrude, whose pride he was, however, unwilling to wound by telling her the truth; so he assigned as his reason for concealment, his grandmother's objection to marriages contracted in extreme youth. In all this your poor father was much to blame. Thus a year passed, during which time Gertrude studiously concealed her engagement from all—even from myself and Eleanor. Perhaps, had she been our equal in age, she might have told us; but as we had always treated her as a child, she feared that we should ridicule the idea of *her* being engaged; and for that reason, no less than because Arthur desired it, she was silent.

"Well, my grandmother, considering that Eleanor and I were old enough to make our *début* into society, brought us out; and we four—that is, Eleanor and I, your father, and Eleanor's brother George—plunged into all the delights of a London season. Poor Gertrude was not to come out for another year, and my grandmother thought even that too soon; but as she had purposely retarded our entrance into society that Gertrude might make hers at nearly the same time, she listened to Gertrude's tearful entreaties to be allowed to 'come out next season.'

"Your mother was then the most exquisite creature that you can imagine. I need not describe her, for you know her well. But what *picture* could convey an adequate idea of the ever-varying expression that beamed in that young, joyous face? I must not dwell upon it, or I shall be unable to continue my story; for your mother was dear—ah! how dear!—to me, and her memory still dwells freshly in my heart.

"I shall never never forget my brother's delighted exclamation, when Eleanor came down stairs dressed for her first

ball. 'Heavens! how beautiful!' And he engaged her to dance with him, again and again, and hardly left her side the whole evening. From that time I witnessed, with pleasure, the growing attachment between the two; an attachment — on *his* part, wild and frantic — almost passing the bounds of reason; on *hers*, gentle, confiding, and tender. How he reconciled to himself his sudden desertion of poor Gertrude, I know not; but I believe he considered her a mere child, and thought that her attachment was as evanescent as his; for, acutely pained by his evident coldness, her pride forbade her shewing that her affection had outlived his.

"Never shall I forget the day when it was announced that Arthur and Eleanor were engaged, and were shortly to be married! Gertrude abruptly left the room; and no one noticed her departure, till she was wanted for one of her masters, when my grandmother sent up stairs for her. The next moment a bell was heard ringing violently over-head; and, as the sound continued, we became alarmed, and went to Gertrude's room, where a terrible sight greeted us. Gertrude lay stretched upon the ground, bathed in blood; and the servant, half beside herself, was frantically calling for help. She had burst a blood-vessel! Medical aid was immediately procured; but her life was for some time despaired of. At last, however, the doctor pronounced her to be out of danger, though, at the same time, he said that her constitution had received so severe a shock, that she would probably not live to be old; and, that any great trouble or anxiety would most likely be fatal to her, as her heart was affected. After a time she recovered; and the marriage of Eleanor and Arthur, which had been postponed, took place. Gertrude was not present on the occasion; she said she could never go through the fatigue — so we did not press her.

"After the bridal party had left, I went to Gertrude's room; and then, her arms round my neck, and her face hidden on my shoulder, she told me all! Her eyes were tearless, and blazed with absolute fury, and her whole frame shook with frightful vehemence, as, with clenched hands, and set teeth, she cursed her happy rival.

"'Nay, tell me not that she is blameless!' she shrieked, rather than said; 'How know I but that he has told her all, and that they are even now exulting in their treachery! I *hate* her! oh! I *hate* her! and, even though I wait for years upon

years, till my form is withered and bent, and my hair silvered with age, I will have revenge! They thought my mind wandered, when I refused to see any one but our dear grand-mamma. Ah! they knew not that if *she* had dared to appear before me, the sight would have turned me mad, and I should have torn her limb from limb. But you, Mary — you are *his* sister! I cannot hate *you*! Ah! be my friend! as much my friend in *truth*, as she was in *seeming*. But never mention her detested name before me, or I shall hate you too!

“And then, for the first time since her illness, she gave way to a flood of tears. After some time, she was calmer; but never could she be persuaded to see either Arthur, or your mother, whose letters will shew you, that whatever suspicions your father may have entertained as to the cause of poor Gertrude’s illness, he preserved her secret inviolate, even from his wife.

“After a while, Gertrude seemed to rally, and made her *débüt* the following season, with an *éclat* which equalled — nay, almost eclipsed — that of your mother. She entered into gaiety with a pleasure — an intense *zest* — such as I had never seen. She delighted to sport with men’s affections, drawing them on, and then discarding them, with utter indifference for their sufferings; and no arguments or entreaties on my part availed to turn her from the course she was pursuing; and, though she had gained the reputation of being a most accomplished coquette, her extraordinary and dazzling beauty rendered her perfectly irresistible. She told me that she should never marry, and that she was only amusing herself with men, considering them fair sport. She seemed to take delight in visiting upon all, the infidelity of one. What would have been the sequel, heaven knows! — but, two years after her marriage, poor Eleanor died. Three years later, Arthur and Gertrude again met. I had observed that Gertrude was more than usually solicitous to appear to advantage that evening; but the cause of her anxiety became apparent to me when, among the crowd of admirers by whom she was surrounded, I beheld my brother, on whom she was bestowing a degree of flattering attention, which answered the purpose for which it was intended. Her extraordinary beauty, heightened by a fascination of manner, which, as a young girl, she had not possessed, revived his old attachment with a force, incredible even to himself. He was infatuated; never, as he confessed,

had he been so completely enslaved. At length, emboldened by her apparent encouragement, he made the offer, and was — refused! — and that, too, in a manner which galled and irritated him beyond endurance. She absolutely *laughed* at his proposal; telling him, that she had not refused far better offers, to accept him at last, and confessing, that she had but been amusing herself at his expense, and had considered him but as *one* of many! He reproached her with her heartlessness. She told him, that *he* had been originally the cause of it, and that but for *him*, she might long ago have been a happy wife; but that his treachery had deprived her of all confidence in his sex. She then haughtily desired him to leave her, and bade him not re-appear in her presence, until he did so with an apology for his presumption — his absurd *vanity*, in daring to suppose that she could bestow a *thought* upon *him*! At first, his indignation overcame his love; but when, not long after, he heard that she was engaged to be married, he came to me in an agony of grief, and besought my aid. I told him, that if she was really engaged, I could do nothing; if not, I would remonstrate with her. I did so, though I had little hope of being able to touch her heart. She listened in haughty silence, until I appealed to her friendship — to her love for me; and then I saw that she was moved. I fell on my knees, and supplicated, in an agony of tears, that she would not cast away from her this last chance of happiness, and make me, as well as herself, miserable, since I felt certain that, if she persisted in rejecting him, a horrible catastrophe would be the result; for he had sworn to me that he would not live without her! “Ah, Gertrude!” I said; “can your vengeance pursue him, even to the grave?”

“She started. ‘It might! but,’ she added, in deeply mournful accents, ‘despise me, Mary, as I despise myself! I love him still! For all these years, passed in levity and distraction — but oh! in what intolerable wretchedness! — I have loved him! Yet I still cherished the thought of revenge; and my heart leaped when I knew that he was free, and that I should at last have it in my power to make *him* feel all the bitter anguish that *I* had suffered years before, and the long sickening misery which follows, and which lasts after the first sharp pang is over! Yes, Mary, I *purposely* drew him on! I *intended* to reject him, and to bestow my hand on another; that he also might suffer the first bitter pang, and the lasting

hopeless misery of years ! For this, I would myself have endured the horror of a union without love, at thought of which, my very soul sickened and revolted !

“ I shrank from her in terror, exclaiming —

“ ‘ What depravity, in one so young ! Henceforth we are no more friends ; our paths lie in different directions ! I shall warn my brother against you ! ’

“ And I left her abruptly. I saw her no more till the next evening, when to my astonishment, she entered my room, and telling me that she had broken off her engagement, and had written to Arthur to summon him, she clung round my neck, and tearfully implored for a return of my affection. Though I could not approve of, what I considered, her dishonourable rejection of the man whose wife she had promised to be, I yet could not resist her pleadings. Not long after, she and Arthur were married ; and, until he fell a victim to the same malady which destroyed my poor mother, and has now attacked me, they lived in the most uninterrupted felicity. Arthur’s idolatrous devotion was wonderful to behold ; and she loved him with a tenacity — an anxious solicitude,—that seemed a sad foreboding of her loss. The rest, Nelly, you know.

“ I too, had my little romance. I was beloved by one who would have made me very happy ; but my grandmother, who was ambitious of a higher match for me, repudiated his addresses in terms which goaded, almost to madness, a proud and sensitive spirit. He left her, declaring that he should not find it difficult to procure a bride in even a nobler and more wealthy family than hers ; and soon after we heard that he was engaged to Miss M —, daughter of Lord M —, a very old friend of his. My pride was so deeply wounded, that I vowed, if he married her, never to see him more. Soon, however, he repented his rash step, and, with renewed affection, wrote to express his sorrow and remorse, and offered, at one word from me, to break off his engagement. I did not answer his letter. In this I was right, since his faith was pledged to Miss M — ; but when, soon after, she confessed to him her preference for another, and entreated him to set her free, he again and again wrote to me to implore a renewal of our engagement. I disregarded his appeals, with a pride and obstinacy which I can never sufficiently regret. He called ; but I would not see him. He continued to write ; but I would not answer ; and when, at last, he wrote to say that if I per-

sisted in so cruelly punishing his error, he would, in other lands, seek to create fresh ties and interests, which might be able to efface the memory of the old ones, I allowed him to depart ! I may not now regret the heavy sorrow which then fell upon me; since it was God's chastening, and His way of subduing a most proud and imperious nature! I have no more to tell."

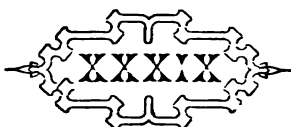
My Aunt, while relating this story, had frequently paused to rest; and now she seemed much exhausted, and, closing her eyes, slumbered. The entrance of Phœbe with the tea, put a stop to my meditations; and I then called little Edie from upstairs, where she had been learning her Collect and Psalms. When she had repeated them correctly, and had received the kiss which was her reward, we sat down to the quiet, but no longer cheerful, tea. No—everything was now tinged with sadness, at the thought of Aunt Mary's approaching departure. All was gloom in my heart, and I said within myself—

"Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun. But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity." But then I remembered the words, "Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? For thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this." And again, "In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him."

"It is the will of God," I murmured; "He *must* know best!"

And that night, as I passed into my little sister's room, and bent over her as she slept in her beauty and innocence, and as I marked the healthy glow on her round, smooth cheek, and listened to her soft and regular breathing, I thought that God, in sending me my portion of blessings and trials, had truly "set the one over against the other," since He had spared me this last, and best beloved treasure; and, falling on my knees, I implored pardon.

I was comforted.



Oh! affection unrequited,
Bitter is your pang to bear;
When the heart's first love is slighted —
And the brow first knows a care:
When experience comes to alter
What before appear'd so bright;
When belief begins to falter —
And the memory hath its night!
SWAIN.

THE following day I received a letter from Oscar. It was so long since I had heard from him, that the delight with which I opened it was alloyed by the dread of hearing of his illness; for I thought that nothing else could have caused his silence. I read it over twice; and a feeling of chilling disappointment succeeded. Again I read; and the big tears slowly gathered in my eyes, and fell unchecked. This was his letter: —

“ MY DEAREST NELLY,

“ I have been prevented answering your last three letters; and your fourth has just reached me. Do not fear for my health, for I am as well as I ever was in my life. What with one thing and another, I am so busy that I have hardly a moment to myself, and can hardly find time to write to you even to-day; but you seem so concerned about me, that I send these few lines to allay your anxiety. Major Griffiths (my father's old friend) has sold out, and is returning to England, and wants me to go with him; but I think it best, for many reasons, to remain here, though my father now wishes me to exchange into a regiment at home. Well, Nelly, the probationary time has now elapsed, and I suppose I may expect you. When are you coming? The sooner, the better. How

grieved I was to hear of your poor mamma's death! I suppose she never got over leaving Rocklands. When you come here to join me 'for better, for worse,' Aunt Mary will be a nice guardian for little Edith. *Apropos*, I cannot enter into your enthusiasm on the subject of that interesting child, whom I always thought rather a bore; but you will be offended if I continue, so I will hold my peace. Write to me, dear Nell, and say when I am to expect you; and if I cannot manage to be in Calcutta when you arrive, I will depute some lady friend to receive you. And now, good-bye for the present, dearest Nelly, and believe me, as ever, yours affectionately,

"OSCAR."

And this was the letter that I had expected for so long; that I had prayed for—oh! how earnestly! how passionately! To the reader it may not seem wanting in affection; but to *me*! Alas! alas! how changed was its style from that of former ones! Where was the sympathy with my deep sorrow? the regret at our separation? His very invitation to join him was couched in a style inexpressibly painful to me; for he seemed to regard it as *matter of course* that I should come. There were none of the lover's anxious doubts and fears—no sanguine anticipations of our meeting. Alas! the whole tone of that letter betrayed but too plainly that the writer was *sure* of the affection of her whom he addressed—*so* sure, that he valued it not!

I had to lay it aside, and to set out on my daily routine of teaching. Oh! the drudgery of that life! To attempt to imbue with a love of sweet sounds natures coarse and brutish! To hear divine harmonies barbarously murdered by powerful voices unallied to sensitive ears! To toil patiently over a troublesome passage—some ten or a dozen times, perhaps—and find an obstinate or stupid pupil, no nearer perfection at the twelfth essay than at the first! And the same with painting, languages—*all*! Two of my pupils *were* docile and obedient, and not wanting in talent; but the rest—there was no hope for them!

In the evening I returned, heart-sick and weary, and, entering the little drawing-room, knelt down beside my aunt, and putting my arms round her neck, laid my cheek against hers; then, as I thought of the coming time, when I could do so no longer, I burst into tears of agony. Soon, however, I became

more tranquil, and sat down to tea; after which I busied myself in trimming a bonnet for little Edie, while she rehearsed her lessons. She then, as usual, related to me her day's adventures, for she had been with Lady L——.

My aunt interrupted us. "Nelly, I have had a letter from Mr. Percival, who thinks of coming here soon. He tells me one good piece of news: Sir Frederic Crosier is engaged to Minnie Ashton, and Mr. Percival is to marry them within a week."

"I am very glad, dear aunt," I replied, dreamily; for the thought of Sir Frederic and of Minnie recalled to me the dear, happy time, that was never to return; and I was plunged in a deep reverie.

"And, Nelly, Percy Elliot has married Blanche, and they are now on their wedding tour. They will not return to M——, for his father has discarded him; and where they will settle appears doubtful."

"I am *very* glad he has married her," I answered, trying to shake off the sadness caused by the memory of the past, and by the contrast of Percy's ardour with Oscar's coldness.

"What ails you to-night, dearest?" enquired my aunt, anxiously gazing in my face.

"Nothing, dear aunt," I replied, evasively. "I believe I am not very well to-night;—or rather," I added, with an attempt at gaiety, "I fear that I am out of temper—'the little black dog on my back,' as they used to tell me when I was a child. Perhaps music may have 'charms to soothe *my* savage breast.'"

And, sitting down to the piano, I tried to tune myself into harmony with the sweet melodies that I was playing. But it would not do—all was jarring within me; and, by a strange fatality, my fingers seemed naturally to form those airs which I had formerly sung with Oscar, whose deep rich voice seemed yet to thrill to my very soul. So I closed the piano, and taking up my brush, tried to paint a rough design for a small picture which had been ordered of me. I had intended to depict smiling meadows, and gay flowers and birds—a sunny sky; but no—my hand obeyed but too faithfully the dictates of my sad, despairing heart. I drew a frightful, arid desert, with a glaring sky overhead. In the foreground was a wild-looking being, with sunken features, terrible eyes, and hands clenched and raised, as if in defiance, against the heavens.

Hastily I dashed my brush through this terrible picture; for it reminded me of the desert of my hopes, and of the horrible wilderness of life that lay before me. Again I essayed; and this time I drew a sky filled with clouds black as night, and a sea whose mountain waves were lashed to fury by the storm. On this sea — without mast, without rudder — was a small frail bark, driving with frightful violence towards the horrid rocks, which reared their craggy peaks like monsters ready to devour it. This, too, I defaced; for the small helpless bark reminded me of myself, and I *would* not think that its shipwreck was inevitable. I tried once more: I drew a poor worn-out pilgrim, pursued by trouble, and disappointment, and misery, in the shape of torturing fiends, and fleeing for protection into the arms of death, whom I represented as a kind and beautiful woman. It would not do — I could not draw to-night; so, after assisting Aunt Mary to bed, I went to my own room, and resolutely sat down to answer Oscar's letter.

All that day the demon Selfishness had been whispering to me, "It is true that time and absence have weakened his affection; but go to him, and your presence will revive it in all its strength." Then I thought of my little darling sister, alone and unprotected; for even if I were able to place her in a comfortable home in England, what care could supply the place of mine? *Who* would watch over her, encourage her dawning virtues, and check her faults, as *I* could do? *Who* else could redeem the solemn pledge given to her dying mother, to "feed her poor starving soul"? I prayed — I supplicated — to be endowed with strength to make a sacrifice more bitter than death; and at last my prayers were heard. I wrote to Oscar, told him exactly how we were circumstanced — that Aunt Mary could not live many weeks longer, when Edith would be without a protector; and that, even were it otherwise, I would not leave my little sister. All this I told him, feeling that, if his love for me were undiminished, he would at once bid me bring her with me to India; — but I knew in my inmost heart that it would *not* be so. In allusion to Major Griffiths' return to England, I expressed deep regret at Oscar's intention of remaining abroad; and this I considered the only way in which I could, with delicacy, hint at my great wish to see him. In conclusion, I begged for a speedy answer; and then, closing my letter, I lay down to rest — feeling sad,

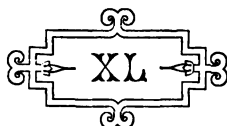
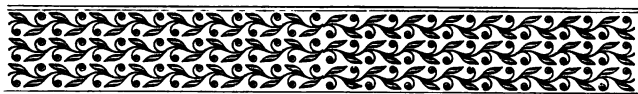
it is true, but knowing that I had done my duty, and that God would be with me in the path I was marking out for myself. The next day, I sent off my letter; and then, the die being cast, I felt comparatively at ease.

An alarming change was now apparent in my dear Aunt Mary, who one day said to me, —

“Nelly, I feel that I must leave you very soon; and I have written to Mr. Percival, to hasten his arrival. I should like to see him once more; but, even if he come too late, he will be a kind friend to you and poor Edie.”

I fell upon her neck, weeping bitterly; for I knew that she spoke truly, and that the fell destroyer was approaching with rapid strides to tear her from me.





Merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace.

ISAIAH lvii. 1, 2.

I WAS sitting beside her bed. The window was open, to admit the fresh spring breezes, and the warm rays of the setting sun streamed into the room. I had been reading aloud to her from the nineteenth chapter of Job; and when I came to the verses, "For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another, though my reins be consumed within me"—she faintly murmured—

"God bless you, my child! Sing to me, Nelly."

And, as well as I could for weeping, I sang Luther's beautiful hymn. As I went on, my voice became clearer; for the spirit of the great man had entered into my soul, and I felt as if the angels of God were hovering around us.

* * * *

The last rays of golden light fell upon the bed, and a smile of ineffable peace and calm was on the angelic face. I laid it gently on my shoulder.

Hush!—draw the curtains—tread softly!

It is over!





—— but, in my grief, drew near
A bosom friend, who dried the useless tear.
CRABBE.

How long I lay in that stupor of grief, I know not; but, on recovering from my swoon, a gentle hand was bathing my brow, and a kind, pitying face was bending over me.

“My poor child!”

I kissed his hands, and clung to him as if I had nothing left on earth.

“Oh! Mr. Percival, is it *real*?”

“It is real; it is the hand of God! Thank Him, that He has not left you *quite* desolate, since your little sister is still spared to you! Thank Him, that you were permitted to soothe the last days of the dear sufferer!”

He was so gentle—so like a kind, feeling *woman*—in his efforts to console me, that at last the despair which had seized upon me with the first consciousness of my terrible loss, yielded to deep sorrow. How kind he was! How untiring in his care and watchfulness! Like a fond and anxious parent, he did all that *could* be done, not only to console me for the present, but to spare me further trouble and anxiety for the future. Obtaining from me the names and addresses of all my pupils, he called on them, explained what had occurred, and easily procured a fortnight’s remission of my duties. He took Edith with him to town; and when she returned, she brought with her the materials for two full suits of mourning, which Lady L—— had procured for us. Finally, dreading that I should, from inaction, sink into a morbid state of melancholy, he one day addressed me thus—

"Nelly, I must soon return to M——, for my friend Wilson, who has undertaken my duties during my fortnight's absence, will be leaving. Now, before I go, I must discuss many things with you. In the first place, how do you mean to live, now that your aunt's income is gone?"

"I have not thought of it," I replied, mournfully.

He continued —

"You cannot, without injuring your health, teach more than you do at present; and yet the rent of this house must be paid."

I sighed, helplessly.

"You will not want so many rooms, now that there are only Edith and yourself. Now, I have a plan. Percy Ellicot and his wife wish to board in some quiet family till Blanche has become a little more used to house-keeping; I think it would just suit them to take a part of this house, and thus you would be relieved of all anxiety with regard to the rent, while you would have as much of the society of your old friends as you wished. You would each have your own apartments, and thus be independent of each other. If you think this plan a good one, I will arrange it with Percy; otherwise, I see not how you are to remain here."

I pressed his hand gratefully, and, in broken words, thanked him for this and all his other kindness.

"Nay, Nelly," he exclaimed; "do not thank me until I tell you *what* motive has prompted me to take so great an interest in your welfare!—I love you! Ah! do not withdraw your hand, Nelly. Do not shrink from me—if my presence or my words pain you, I will never again annoy you with either; but oh! hear me, if it be for the last time! I have loved you, Nelly, for years—yes, long, long years! I loved you when you were the young unformed girl; when you were the admired beauty, the wealthy heiress of Rocklands. I forebore to tell you of it, not because your wealth and position raised you above me,—no, I felt that love so honest and sincere as mine rendered me fully worthy of you, and that I was your equal;—but I feared that the disparity in our age would render it impossible for you to return my affection, and that, even were it otherwise, the quiet monotonous existence of a country clergyman's wife would be unsuited to you. Even in your changed circumstances, I was fully persuaded that you would make a brilliant marriage; and I therefore refrained

from expressing my feelings, fearing, by so doing, to alarm you, and thus to lose even your *friendship*. But now I find you alone and helpless, without a single relation to whom you can turn for comfort and support;—you, nursed in the lap of luxury, once surrounded by all that wealth or the love of friends could bestow—your tastes cultivated, your wishes anticipated and gratified:—I find you, a frail and delicate girl, not shrinking from the ills of life, and feebly repining at your changed lot, but nobly struggling for the support of those who ministered to your childish years, and of the little sister who, in infancy, was so often preferred to you! And I know well your pride must have been galled, your feelings of delicacy and refinement outraged, when you first commenced the avocations of a paid teacher. It was not the *toil* which harassed you,—it was the *degradation*—as *you* thought it. Degradation? Nay; it was the noblest self-sacrifice—the most exalted heroism! And, in thus acting, you have raised yourself so far above the wealthy heiress, that I feel the distance widened between us; and, but for your lonely, helpless position, I would not dare ask you to be my wife!”

He had spoken thus far with glowing cheek and kindling eye, half carried away by his enthusiasm; but now his voice sank to low, mournful accents, as he continued—

“Oh! Nelly, do not refuse me! I cannot expect you to love me as you would one of your own age and temperament; but if my devotion—my never-failing interest in you—my indulgence—all, in short, that I can offer to make you happy for long, long years to come—if they can win some portion of your affection, I shall be content. Nelly, Nelly, if not for *my* sake, for your own! Oh! consider the hard life that is before you—you, so young, and tender, and beautiful! I have loved you so long, Nelly! When you left Rocklands, I felt as if half my life had been taken from me; and I used to sit in my little parlour in the sad evenings trying to read, trying to divert my thoughts, but to no purpose; my book would fall from my hands, and I would be lost in sad memories of the time that could never, never come back. Yes, Nelly, strong man as I am, my tears have flowed at the thought that you could never be mine; for you are the first and only woman I have ever loved!”

There was silence. A stillness, as of the tomb, fell upon me—an overwhelming feeling of regret for I knew not what.

I thanked him fervently for the honour he had done me—yes, the *honour* of thinking me worthy to be *his* wife! I told him that I esteemed and respected him more than any one in the world, and that I *could* have loved him *so* well—oh! *so* well!—but that—and my voice faltered, and I buried my face in my hands in an agony of tears—I was betrothed to—I loved—another!

For a moment he was silent; then his usual gentleness of manner returned, and he answered, with *his* smile—so sweet and kind, but so inexpressibly sad:—

“Forgive me, Nelly, my child, for paining you. Believe me, I will never renew the subject. Regard me still as your quiet old friend, who bore you in his arms when you were a little child, and who loved your poor mother and your dear Aunt Mary. With God’s help, I will conquer a feeling which gives you pain. Will you promise me, Nelly, to think no more of what has just passed, and still to regard me as before?”

“I do.”

He remained at our village for some days after that; and when we parted, we were again “Mr. Percival” and “Nelly.”





XLII

Sorrow breaks seasons, and reposing hours
Makes the night morning, and the noon-tide night.

RICHARD THE THIRD.

THE day after his departure, Lady L—— was announced. Embracing me affectionately, she begged that I would accompany her in her drive, as she wished to talk with me. As soon as we were seated in the carriage, she began:—

“ My dear Nelly, you must listen to me patiently, and must not say ‘No’ at first; for I have set my heart on what I am going to propose. Nelly, I want you to be my child, in place of my poor Kate, whose loss has left a dreary blank in our home. You will, as our adopted child, hold the same position that she did; all that the warmest affection can devise shall be yours, as well as the fortune which would have been hers. She loved you, Nelly—as who would not, that witnessed your heroic exertions in behalf of your family, and marked the noble fortitude, the uncomplaining resignation, with which you have borne your losses! You are my nearest living relative, and for your poor mother’s sake, no less than your own, you are dear to me as a child; and I cannot bear to see you, at your age, and with your attractions, toiling for your daily bread.”

Taking her hands, and pressing them to my lips, I thanked her warmly for her intended kindness; but sorrowfully added, that, on Edith’s account, I could not avail myself of it.

“ But, Nelly, dearest, you surely do not intend to sacrifice yourself entirely to Edith! She is a dear little child; but she was so young when *her* share of misfortune fell upon her, that she cannot feel it much. With *you* the case is different;

your tastes and habits are formed; and to have to relinquish all the refinements of existence, must be a sad trial to you. I propose to place Edith in a good school, where she will be thoroughly grounded in all the branches of a sound English education, and qualified to earn her bread by teaching — as you do now. It will come easily and naturally to *her*, for she will be brought up with the idea of doing so; while you, who had every reason to suppose that your life would be rich and prosperous, must find such drudgery insupportable. Think, Nelly, of the advantage it will be to Edith; while, if you refuse, you must still send her to school, as you cannot be absent all day teaching, and educate the child as well — and, of course, you intend to bring her up as a governess?"

I sighed heavily as I thought of this sad life for my little gay birdie, and resolved, come what might, that I would try to save her from it.

"No, dear Lady L——; I cannot accept your most kind and generous offer. My present life is not so irksome to me as you suppose. So long as I have my health, and see my little sister well and happy, I shall thank God, and shall try never to mar present enjoyment by contrasting it with the days that are gone."

It was in vain that she used every argument to persuade me; I was immovable; and she wished me goodbye with sadness and disappointment.

Her words sank deeply into my heart, and I mused long and anxiously. What, indeed, was to become of my poor little sister, even taking the brightest view of the subject, and supposing that I were spared for some years to qualify her for the position of a governess? No; she should not — on that I was resolved — she *should* not have to earn her bread! I must — I *would* — save her from what even *I* shrank from with repugnance. But how? Then recurred to me Lady L——'s words: "My poor Kate, whose loss has left a dreary blank in our home!" — and I wondered that I had not suggested to Lady L—— to transfer her offer to my little sister, who would then be provided for for life, and would again be placed in the brilliant position of which her poor mother had so bitterly lamented having deprived her. But to give up my darling — the only comfort left to me — whose sweet face and joyous laugh were like a sun-beam in the house! To hear no more the nightly "God bless my sister Nelly!" as the

soft arms were clasped round my neck, and the dimpled cheek was pressed to mine! No more to have her with me — to think for, and study, and love! Alas! I forgot the words, "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air, for they toil not, neither do they reap, yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them. . . . But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Take, therefore, no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." And, again: "Trust in the *Lord* with all thy might, and lean not to thine *own* understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and *He* shall direct thy paths." How was it that I could trust to God's providence for myself, and not for this child? that I could look forward calmly to my *own* future, though I anticipated many troubles and afflictions; and yet could not bear to do *my* best for this loved one, and leave the rest to God? She was becoming so gentle and obedient, and was now really, I thought, so imbued with a love of religion, that I felt amply repaid for all the anxiety and care I had bestowed on her; and I could have been content to toil on for her sake, and thus to live for the rest of my life, wishing for nothing more, so long as I had my cherished darling with me. And now — to part with her! Oh! I *could* not! Yet, how selfish of me to deny her the same lot which had fallen to myself in early life! How selfish, to immure such perfection within this humble dwelling! But, on the other hand, could I be quite sure that my darling was strong enough in her sense of right and wrong, to be trusted away from the fostering care which had hitherto shielded her? I was sadly perplexed. I could not trust myself to decide; for my poor weak heart ceased not to plead, — "She is all you have left! They are all gone — the loved ones, who made your life so happy! You have but her to cheer you — the 'one little ewe lamb,' that you have 'bought and nourished up!' It is all you have left; and when she is gone, you will be desolate indeed!" And that night, as I bent over my slumbering darling, I felt very weak, and (*I thought*) very selfish.

This went on for days; and through all my trouble I had to teach — teach — teach — till I thought my brain would

give way, or my heart break. Each day, when I returned to our little dwelling, I caught sight of the sweet innocent face, pressed against the window-panes, to catch the first glance of "dear sister Nelly," that she might run out to open the little gate, and receive the kiss, and "God bless my darling!" which sprang to my lips when I clasped my treasure in my arms. I was dissatisfied with myself; I felt that some resolution must be taken, yet I had not courage to decide. At last, I remembered an old saying, uttered by some wiseacre years before:—"When we are in a dilemma, and know not how to decide, let us choose that path which is least agreeable to ourselves; it will generally prove to be the right one." "*Generally*," perhaps; but not *always*: but I did not thus consider this. I only feared allowing my little sister to lose so bright a destiny through my selfish wish to keep her with me. I resolved to cast aside self; I determined to "choose the path least agreeable to me."

A few days more, and I had called on Lady L——. At first, I found her impracticable; but all was soon arranged, and I returned home with a sad and heavy heart, for my darling was to leave me. I saw that Lady L——, with all her kindness, would not adopt more than *one*; for she evidently wished that one so entirely to take the place of her lost child, that *none* should step in to share the affection she wished to monopolize. If she had adopted *two* sisters, this could not have been the case; for they would have loved each other, exchanged sympathies, and *she* would have occupied but a secondary place in the heart she wished to engross. It was quite natural; and Lady L—— was a kind and generous woman.

And so I was to lose my little Edie.

On returning home, I found some letters awaiting me; the first was from Mr. Percival.

"MY DEAR NELLY,

"I write to tell you that Percy and Blanche are most anxious to join you in house-keeping. I enclose their address, in order that you may make all arrangements. So much for business. I found all my poor people quite well, and delighted to see me; and I have again shaken down into my old ways, not at all disturbed by my visit to the gay metropolis. I have no news: all the M—— people are as

usual. Crosier and his wife are on their wedding tour. Farewell; and believe me, dear child,

“ Ever your sincere friend,

“ REGINALD PERCIVAL.”

This letter made me shed a few tears; it was so simple and unaffected; but, above all, so unselfish. He did not, however, succeed in deceiving me. I knew that he was suffering, though, in his anxious care to save me from a single pang on his account, he affected to be reconciled to his disappointment, and to have settled down contentedly to his old life.

The other two letters were from Lady Ashton and Miss Grayson, reminding me of my “promise” to visit them, and saying, that they feared I had forgotten poor old Rocklands, or I should not have neglected it so long. Lady Ashton entreated me to come “*directly*,” for that she was so lonely without Minnie, that she knew not what to do; besides, she longed to see me again—the sight of me would refresh her; for nothing had been nice at M—— since we left it. Miss Grayson wrote in a modest and deferential style, such as she had never used when we were rich and influential people. She bade me remember my “promise” to visit her after Lady Ashton; and again there was an allusion to her “homely way of living,” which touched me deeply; for she affected to ignore the fact of *my* present “way of living” being far more “homely” than hers. I answered both these letters from my heart, but declined the kindness so delicately offered. To Mr. Percival I wrote more at my leisure; for I felt that I could not bestow too much care and pains on a letter to so good a friend, who would perhaps dwell on each sentence and word, and treasure the very paper on which my hand had rested.

And now the day had come when Edith was to leave me; and with trembling hand I lifted her into the little carriage, and took the reins. I had charged Lady L—— not to mention to Edith that I had put her in my stead; and, as she was anxious to secure Edith’s affection, she promised compliance—for she did not wish my sister to know that I had had her first offer.

As our humble conveyance drove up to the splendid mansion in Grosvenor-square, my heart failed me at the thought that Edith might one day be ashamed of having thus arrived at her new home.

"Edith, darling, you will never be ashamed of your sister Nelly?"

"Oh, Nelly!" she exclaimed, reproachfully.

One more kiss, and she entered her new home alone; for I would not enter with her, as I could not trust myself any longer.

Sadly I returned to my lonely dwelling, where Phœbe vainly tried to console me. Tea was ready; Bully was piping away from his station in the window; and the deserted Tibbets, regardless of his loss, lay purring in my lap. Mechanically, I looked round for some work, and here again was reminded of the sad change; for my evenings had generally been employed in working for Edith, whom I had always managed to dress well, and even fashionably. What pride I had taken in the little bonnets, and dresses, and cloaks, and the delicate trimmings with which I used to deck my little sister! My own toilet was simple, and needed little attention, for my wardrobe consisted of two dresses only; — one, for common wear, of black stuff; the other of silk of the same colour, trimmed with crape. A small linen collar, close round my throat, for the morning, and a lace one for the evening, completed my attire.

That was, indeed, a dreary evening. I tried to read, but could not; to sing, but my voice trembled: so I turned to my easel, and there found congenial employment in continuing a picture which I had begun long before. It was a family portrait; and the figures consisted of my own mother, my aunt, my mamma, little Edith, and myself. My work was nearly finished; and I intended, when it was completed, to hang it in my room, where I already had a miniature of my father, and a larger copy of the same, which I had made. There was also a portrait of my Aunt Mary, and one of my mother; and there were likenesses of Minnie Ashton, Mr. Percival, Blanche Elliot, and little Amy Crosier. There was, besides, a miniature of Oscar when a boy, which, together with one painted just before his departure, he had given me: the latter was locked up, apart, and kept sacred from all eyes but mine. Then, there were likenesses of poor Gulnare, and of Bob, and of Tibbets (the latter drawn, by Edith's express command, seated on a red velvet cushion, and with a large blue bow round his neck), and a portrait of Bully. There were also numerous landscapes, taken at Rocklands, and in the neigh-

bourhood; and many views of different parts of the grounds. There were two pictures of my dear little bay, which often drew tears to my eyes: one was in calm weather, the other in a storm. There was, too, a drawing of Aunt Mary's cottage and garden, and a view of our house. But a great gem was a fancy portrait of my aunt and her two friends, Gertrude and Eleanor. They were represented as the three Graces; and certes, not even the three fair heathen themselves could have surpassed them: the group was perfection, not only as regarded the unutterable grace which the artist had infused into their forms, and into the light drapery which floated in gauzy folds around them, but also as concerned the likeness to the originals, which, in a picture of that kind, is too often neglected. But, all through the room, were portraits of little Edith—the first, taken when she was a baby, only a few months old; she lay sleeping in her cradle, amongst rich satins and laces, which looked all poor and mean beside her exceeding loveliness. The second was taken when she was three years old; she was seated on the grass, with her lap full of bright flowers, a wreath of which encircled her brow; and her large eyes had that peculiarly earnest and thoughtful expression which I have mentioned. The next, was a portrait painted by the first painter of the day. In it she was represented as an angel, and the face was drawn in different positions, and many times repeated—peeping out from among the light clouds which filled the picture; the effect was most beautiful. There was also a lovely picture, executed by the same great genius, at my father's express desire. It consisted of myself and Edith, as children, sleeping peacefully in each others' arms, while our two mothers, represented as guardian angels, stood over us to protect our slumbers. This picture had been painted very much against the wish of my step-mother, who could not bear to be represented on the same canvass with her rival; but my father would have it so. My own mother's portrait was, of course, copied from one taken in her lifetime.

This assemblage of all that was connected with a past so dearly loved by me, made this room my favourite resort; and I now intended to live in it more than ever, for Percy and Blanche were to arrive on the morrow.

The following morning, I set out on my accustomed duties, giving all necessary directions with Phœbe, in case the new

comers should arrive before my return. As I wended my way home in the evening, my steps lingered when I approached the house, and thought that they might already be there; for a foolish pride made me dread my first meeting with them in my humble circumstances. I need not have feared; the moment my bell sounded, out flew Blanche, who, clasping me in her arms, and looking not one bit the married woman, exclaimed joyfully—

“Oh, Nelly darling! it does me good to see you! you dear old friend! I have often—often thought of you, in all my troubles!”

Then out rushed Percy; and he, too, gave me a hug, saying, “I must have *one* kiss, Nelly, if only for ‘Auld lang syne!’ I’m the happiest fellow in the world; and now that my wife will have *you* for a friend, I want nothing—*nothing*!”

He did, indeed, look the picture of happiness; and, as he concluded, and gently drew his young wife to his breast, his honest, manly face beaming with truth and devotion, there was a tear in her eye—but not of sadness. We sat down together in the little drawing-room, which they pronounced the most perfect *bijou* they had ever seen.

“Ah, Nelly dear!” said Blanche, with a gentle sigh, “who would have thought, when you and I were riding, dancing, picnic-ing, and enjoying other follies together at M——, and in town,—who would have thought that we should one day settle down thus? You, the sober lady of the house,—I, your guest, and pupil?—for, indeed, I am sadly ignorant of all that I ought to know, and you will have to teach me everything! Now that that dear, good fellow, has given up all for me, I cannot study too much to make his home comfortable!”

“Nonsense, Blanche!” interrupted Percy; “I will not have you talk thus! What, on earth, have I given up for you? When we were at M——, all I cared for, as you know, was to be *with* you, and *away from* that unmitigated essence of acidity and old-maidenism—yclept Florence. Now, these two objects I never *could* accomplish at M——; consequently, I think I make a clear gain by dragging *you* into poverty! Eh, Nelly?”

“Well,” I replied, “to speak candidly, I think you have *both* made a ‘clear gain’; and I also have come in for a share of it, for I feel already cheered by your society!”

We now held a council of war, the result of which was the

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following division of the house. The two bed-rooms which had belonged to my aunt and mother were to form, what we laughingly called, "their private suite of apartments"; one being fitted up as a sitting-room. *My* private suite consisted of the other three rooms; the dining and drawing-room were common property.

I had expressly stipulated with Lady L——, that Edith was to come home every Saturday, and to remain with me till the following Monday; so that I preserved her room intact. I had also told her (though without mentioning Oscar's name), I was engaged, and *might* have to go abroad, in which case I should wish my little sister, if she were willing, to accompany me. To this, also, as there was no alternative, Lady L—— gave a reluctant assent.

Well, all our arrangements being concluded, we sat down to supper, and, soon after, went to bed. After that, my time passed much more pleasantly than before; for these young people were so simple and true-hearted, that they charmed me back into a portion of my old gaiety. We kept very primitive hours,—breakfasting at eight, dining at two (but this meal I seldom joined), and having tea at five. They were never weary of shewing me little acts of kindness; it seemed as if they were so full of happiness that they had too much of it, and wished to bestow a portion on me—their "mamma," as they called me. They seemed to have quite thrown aside the memory of their former mode of living, and to settle down to their present one, not only with resignation, but with absolute pleasure. One evening, when I had returned rather sooner than they expected me, I found Percy, divested of his coat, digging in the garden, which he declared he intended to take under his especial supervision. He assured me that he had bought a book on gardening, and that he meant to become thoroughly *au fait*; it was good for his health and his temper, he said, now that he had nothing else to do. On another occasion, I surprised Blanche at work on the family linen, which she, in my absence, had feloniously abstracted from the press, with a view to save me the trouble of repairing it. They would never allow me to sit alone in my room, unless they saw that I had *really* something to occupy me there. Blanche would come with a gentle knock, which made me open the door, when she and Percy would rush in, and, *bon gré, mal gré*, drag me down stairs. We used to have some

very pleasant walks and drives; for we found, that, by placing a seat against the dash-board, the little chaise would easily hold three. Percy, besides being head-gardener, had now constituted himself coachman and groom; so that the pony, and the carriage, presented a more creditable appearance than they had done for some time. Percy was always arranging little surprises for me; now, it was a new piece of music, or a song, placed ready for me on the piano, by the time I returned in the evening; now, it was some fresh ornament for the celebrated chiffonière. Again, it would be part of a "cheap lot" of gloves, which he had bought for Blanche. (By the bye, they *were* the most marvellously "cheap" gloves; but I never could get him to tell me the name of the desirable emporium whence they emanated). Then, perhaps, when I entered the drawing-room, worn out with my day's teaching, I would find a brilliant scarlet gentleman, in the shape of a lobster, smiling at me from the tea-board, with, perchance, a pen in his hand, a pipe in his mouth, and a paper cocked hat on his head; for Percy was very absurd, in the midst of all his kindness, and both he and Blanche were untiring in their endeavours to "make poor Nelly laugh," — in which philanthropic effort they were, I must confess, so often successful, that I was fast regaining my old cheerfulness; and when Saturday came, and my little sister's bright face was beaming amongst us, I felt that *nothing* was wanting—at least, very little.

We were one evening discussing the news of Rocklands, and I was expressing my pleasure at the marriage of Minnie Ashton.

"Ah!" said Percy, "we were all very much surprised, for every one could see that Crosier was attached to poor Aunt Mary; and when she left, and for some time after, he looked utterly wretched. By degrees, however, he frequented the Ashton's house more and more; and, at length, it was known that he had proposed to Minnie, whom he now evidently prefers to all the world. They are still on their wedding tour. Poor Percival is sadly changed, looking ill, and care-worn. His faithful old servant is very anxious about him, for she thinks he must be ill. She frequently hears him pacing to and fro in his room, during half the night; he is very absent—sometimes, not hearing or answering her when she speaks; and now and then, when he does not notice her entrance, she finds him lost in thought. Once or twice, she has heard him draw deep

sighs, as if he were utterly weary and heart-sick. Yet he is as unremitting as ever in his efforts to do good; his poor are still the objects of his most anxious care; and he is gentle and patient with all. Poor fellow! good as he is, he must now and then feel his intellect terribly cramped and confined, within the compass of that little dull village; and in his quiet rectory he must sadly feel the want of a congenial spirit, to sympathise with him in his pleasures, as well as in his troubles. He ought to marry."

I sighed; for my heart ached as I thought of *my* share in the ruin I had just heard described; and, as the image rose before me of that dear, kind face, with its glorious brow — glorious in its might of intellect and goodness, even more than in its purely physical beauty — clouded over by me! But Blanche spoke:—

"Talking of marrying, do you remember, Nelly, your childish flirtation with Oscar Herbert? We really thought it was serious! I am glad we were mistaken; for I do not like his character. Florence has a friend in India, the wife of one of Oscar's fellow officers, and through that source we have heard a great deal of Mr. Oscar. He was engaged, not long ago, to a Miss Leslie, a very beautiful girl, with some money; but the match somehow came to an end: they say that she broke it off on account of his desperate flirtation — to call it by no *harsher* term — with a married woman, the bold and unprincipled Mrs. Wallace. However that may be, Miss Leslie had a very narrow escape; for Oscar would not make a good husband. This flirtation with Mrs. Wallace is but one of many which have reached our ears: in fact, I think he must be very selfish and heartless; for as long as his vanity is gratified, or he is amused, he cares not who suffers; and he is proud of having earned the reputation of an accomplished lady-killer!"

"Yes," interrupted Percy; "but you must remember, that all this comes from Florence, who bears an old grudge against Oscar, and would certainly 'nothing *extenuate*,' and 'set down *all*' in malice; so we ought not to believe everything *she* says!"

By an immense effort of self-control, I betrayed not the agony of fear and doubt with which my inmost soul was shaken. I sat there, calm and impassible, quietly plying my needle as before; and, soon after, we parted for the night.

Oh! that night of horror! Shall I ever forget it? Shall I ever forget the fierce struggle that seemed to shake my very reason!—the struggle, to summon all my pride and courage—to give him up! The morning light found me still seated in my room,—undecided, wavering, wretched! But she who has to earn her daily bread has but the *night* in which to indulge her grief, or find the clue that may lead her out of the tangled labyrinth of her perplexed thoughts; and so, as usual, when the horn of the morning coach sounded its daily call to labour, I stepped into it, and was borne swiftly to the great, stony-hearted city.

That evening, in walking home, I became calmer; for I reflected that, as Percy said, the information came through Florence, who would, if possible, exaggerate anything she might hear to Oscar's disadvantage. I therefore resolved, still to hope and trust as before,—not to *believe* the terrible story. Alas! could I so deceive myself? No; I felt its truth in my inmost soul!

By degrees, I recovered my former spirits; and time passed on, as before, very happily, in the society of Blanche and Percy. I had managed to put by a little money. I felt this to be absolutely necessary; for I thought it just possible that Oscar *might* ere long summon me and Edith to India; and, in that case, what was to provide our outfit? Lady L——, whose kindness to me had but seemed to increase since her adoption of Edith, would, I knew, gladly furnish me with as much money as I might want; but I could not bear the thought of receiving any further obligation from her; so I went on teaching and saving.

And now occurred an event which, perfectly unforeseen, fell upon my heart with such crushing force, that for a long while my sun of happiness was darkened by it. Edith came home one day in high spirits to tell me that she was to go to Paris for two years, to finish her education! At first I would not believe it possible; but when Edith convinced me that such was really intended, I calmly declared that "it should not be," and the next morning accompanied my sister to her home, where I expressed the same to Lady L——. Then arose a polite, yet somewhat angry discussion, which I attempted to terminate, by saying—

"No, Lady L——; I should not feel justified in allowing the child to remain so long away from me—especially in

Paris. I only parted with her on condition that I should constantly see her, and have the opportunity of instilling into her mind that *moral* culture without which all the accomplishments in the world would be useless."

"But," argued Lady L——, "my husband's duties will almost compel us to reside in Paris for the next two years; and I think that you cannot, on reflection, deprive the child of the great advantages which she will derive from finishing her education in the most refined metropolis in the world."

"Add also, Lady L——, the most politely vicious and depraved!"

"Nay—you are over severe! There are good people to be met with everywhere."

"True; and I have met with as good and worthy people in Paris as anywhere. But the *general* tone of morals in that—I confess—enchanting city, is far below what we meet with in England; and the same vices and crimes which, in our matter-of-fact little isle, appear in all their native ugliness—unadorned and unvarnished—are there so gilded, so refined, that they cease to be loathsome. There Irreligion—that great source of every ill—stalks triumphant.—Oh! Lady L——, it cannot be! Since you are obliged to leave England, give me back my little sister! She is now pure and unsullied; and with God's help, I will keep her so. She can again live, as she did before; and I can work to support her, if not in luxury, at least in comfort and purity! Come, Edith, darling, return with me; and I will try to make you very happy in the little home you used to love so well!"

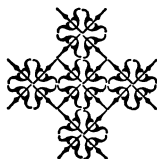
But as I advanced, the child clung to her new friend, saying, that she could not leave her dear new mamma, who loved her better than all the world, and had been so good to her!—that she would go with her to Paris—anywhere; but that she would never leave her! The mischief was done!—that young heart, which I had fancied so pure and unsullied, was already alienated from me; and that, too, not, as she fancied, by the *kindness* of her benefactress, but by her natural love of that pomp, and wealth, and luxury, with which, alas! toil as I might, not even *my* anxious, doting affection, could surround her! A mist swam before my eyes. I could only articulate a few broken words, to the effect, that in a week I would let Lady L—— know my decision; and I turned away sorrowfully. That day, some of my pupils were more than usually

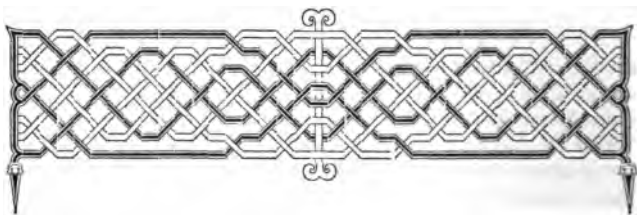
stupid and refractory, and did their best, apparently, to worry the "cross teacher." For days, I thought anxiously, and came to no decision; but I intended to speak seriously with Edith the following Sunday, when we should be alone, and I could appeal to the affection which I believed she still felt for me. On Saturday, however, when I returned home, my little sister did not, as usual, run out to greet me; and on entering the house, bitter tears of disappointment rose to my eyes, as a note from her was placed in my hands, and I felt that the opportunity for which I sighed would not be mine. It ran thus —

"MY DEAR, DEAR SISTER NELLY,

"Do not be angry with me for not spending Sunday with you. I would have gone as usual, but I was afraid you would not let me return; — and indeed, *indeed* I could not bear to part from my dear, kind mamma! Nelly — do be the same dear, kind sister you have always been, and let me go to Paris; for I could not — oh! I *could* not — live again at the cottage! Oh! *let* me go with dear mamma!"

Alas! alas! and was this the return for all my love and devotion? The love of years was cast aside as valueless, and the affection of this new friend exalted on its ruins! I made one last attempt to touch her heart: it was of no avail, and I yielded. Edith went to Paris.





A violet in her lovely hair,
A rose upon her bosom fair,
But, oh! her eyes
A lovelier violet disclose,
And her ripe lips the sweetest rose
That's 'neath the skies.

A lute beside her graceful hand
Breathes music forth at her command;
But still her tongue
Far richer music calls to birth
Than all the minstrel power on earth
Can give to song.

And thus she moves in tender light,
The purest ray, where all is bright,
Serene and sweet;
And sheds a graceful influence round,
That hallows e'en the very ground
Beneath her feet. SWAIN.

Two years passed on without any material change. Percy and Blanche were still with me; and we had become such good friends, that no one spoke of parting. In all this time I had heard but once from Oscar; and his letter was so brief and hurried, that I read it only once, and then put it away — for it was evident the *heart* of the writer was not in it. I heard pretty often from Edith, and very frequently from Lady L——. She told me that I should find my sister much improved in appearance (but I thought *that* impossible!), and added, that she was gentle and amiable enough to please even *me*. Lady L—— was now very anxious to return home, and

to present her adopted child—of whom she was evidently very proud—to her friends; for Edith—no longer “*little Edith*”—was now eighteen. At last I received a letter, naming the very day for their return. How impatiently did I count the days—the hours—almost, the minutes—which must elapse ere I could once more clasp my darling in my arms!

I was becoming far more reconciled to my teaching, which was no longer the drudgery it had once been; and I had laid by a little stock of money for any unforeseen emergency that might arise. I had almost given up all thought of the unfortunate *outfit*, and tried to think as little as possible of all connected with it. Mr. Percival had not again visited H—, but he frequently wrote to me, and his letters were always hailed with pleasure by me, for they breathed nothing but the purest friendship—the most anxious, brotherly concern for my welfare; and they were written in so cheerful a style as to convince me that I need no longer accuse myself of having embittered the existence of this dear, best friend. He always told me the news, such as it was, of the village—all the “births, marriages, and deaths,” amongst poor and rich—all the “*on dit*” of M— and the neighbourhood for miles round; for I had told him that everything—even the least scrap of news—from M— would interest me. This part of his letters I used to read aloud in full conclave; and great were the joking, and merriment, and speculation it afforded—Percy always sending us into irrepressible fits of laughter by his absurd comments. I felt more cheerful for days after receiving these letters; for the quiet, serene tone of the writer’s mind sank deeply into my heart, and infused into my thoughts a portion of their own benignant influence. He dwelt much upon the one great purpose of this life,—preparation for a better. He spoke of the insignificance of our present trials, which are in *themselves* unworthy of our attention in the great journey of life, yet which are most important as regards their *effects*—the grand end for which they are sent—namely, their influence upon our heart and conduct. To allow them to engross our thoughts, so far as to interfere with our duty towards God and our neighbour, would be, he said, to defeat the very object they were intended to serve. “Suppose,” he said, “that one, running in a race, were to stop by the way to examine carefully all the stones which lay in his path, while his competitor, noticing them just sufficiently to avoid falling

over them, allowed them not to check his progress;—one would have arrived at the goal, while the other was yet pausing half-way to examine some trifling impediment which he might easily have cleared at a bound! Such conduct would be to us an evidence of insanity; but is it not, my child, just as irrational to allow what will hereafter appear to us to have been *very* slight trials, to arrest us in our great onward course?—yes, and sometimes even to make us fall by the way, so that we rise no more!”

His letters did me good;—they made me feel strong to bear the present ills of life, and armed me with courage to look forward to those that might await me. And he took such *large* views of existence, — looking at it in its one broad scheme and purpose — its great *whole* — not breaking it up, and examining it bit by bit, — that I began to dwell less on the cares and vexations of every-day life, and to think more of the destined goal than of the rugged path which led to it.

At last, the day I had so longed for came, and I was once more to see my darling sister. She had arrived the night before; and as my duties would not allow of my seeing her during the day, I had promised to spend that evening with the L——’s: so, hastening home when the teaching was over, I donned my sober grey silk, and, allowing myself the luxury of a hired coach, reached Grosvenor Square soon after nine o’clock.

As I alighted, and glanced at the windows, I saw, by the brilliant illumination within, that they had friends that evening; and I felt disappointed — for I had hoped to find my sister alone, and had even expected to be clasped in her arms the moment I was in the house. I entered the drawing-room, wherein about thirty people — Lady L——’s most intimate friends — were assembled; and, after speaking to her, looked anxiously for Edith.

“Ah! you want your sister? There she is — flirting, as usual!”

I looked to where she pointed, and beheld a knot of gentlemen, grouped around an ottoman; but I could not see my sister, for she was seated, and they stood between her and us. As we advanced, however, there was, for a moment, an opening in the group, and Edith sprang forward, with the delighted exclamation — “Nelly!” then seizing my hands, and, saying to her admirers (who evidently wished me farther) —

"Dont tease me any more, to-night! I want to be alone with her all this evening. She is my sister!"

She hurried me away to an inner room.

"Oh, Nelly!" she began, "I am *so* glad to see you, and I have so *much* to tell you! I am *so* sorry to leave Paris! so sorry, that I really feel quite kindly towards those people I was talking to just now,—because I knew them there. If it were not for the sake of seeing *you* again, I should be quite miserable at returning to England! But Nelly," she resumed, glancing with a strange, half-annoyed look, at my unfortunate grey silk (my *best* dress—be it known), "how very oddly you are dressed! Such a horrid colour! So very unbecoming! And the make! Who on earth made it?"

"Why, Edie darling, you forget; I am my *own* modiste!"

"Hush!" she answered, glancing round fearfully, and colouring. "Hush! some one might hear you!"

"If they did, darling, it would not matter. But now let me look at you; for you are grown so unlike my 'little Edie,' that I think I shall have to grow accustomed to you, before I can love you as well as I did her!"

And I made her stand before me, while I gazed, proudly and admiringly, I confess, yet with a feeling of sadness and disappointment, on her resplendent loveliness. She was, in truth, no longer the little childish sister—childish, beyond her years—whom I had thought of during this long absence, and yearned after as if she were my own daughter. She was tall, and slight; and the graceful folds of her rich, pink silk robe, fell around a form which might have served as model for a Phidias. All that refinement and taste of style, in which, so far as *la parure* is concerned, our gay continental neighbours surpass us, had been freely lavished, to heighten charms of which nature had already been so prodigal. As I gazed on her, I thought that the world itself could not furnish the match to her exceeding loveliness!

Her forehead was encircled by a row of those small delicate curls, which we see in the portraits of Henrietta Maria, and the ladies of that time; the remainder of her hair was drawn loosely back, in undulating waves, and fell, in graceful curls, at the back of her small head. The eyes, large, dark, and brilliant, yet tempered, by the long velvet lashes, to languid softness, were of strange, seductive beauty; while the delicate bloom on her cheek, and the rich carmine of her lips, proved

that health had been made as great an object of consideration, as personal appearance. I gazed on her with deep pride and affection, and yet, as I have said, with sadness; for I felt that the little child had suddenly become a woman,—yes, *too* suddenly, I thought, for her simplicity of heart to have remained untouched!

I did not see so much of her as I had hoped to have done, for she was so very gay, that she was seldom at home in the evening; and even when she was, though I had a general invitation to the house, and though kind Lady L—— ceased not to reproach me for “neglecting her,” I went very seldom; for on the evenings when they were at home, they had receptions, and I could not well afford the expense of the carriage, and of dressing to my sister’s satisfaction. Besides, I had a disagreeable consciousness of being a sort of impostor, when I associated with their friends on terms of equality; for my sister had made me promise, not even to *hint* to any one that I was a teacher. So I went very rarely to the L——’s. Edith sometimes came, as of old, to spend Sunday with me; and I should then have felt perfectly happy, had I not seen, with deep regret, that her heart was not placed where alone, “true joys are to be found”; and that *my* influence was too weak to resist that of the flattery which was poured at the feet of the beautiful heiress of Lord L——. In my holidays, I spent a fortnight with them, at their country-seat, and then found that my influence over her mind had returned; but it vanished, almost as soon as I had left her; for poor Edith’s great failing was her extreme proneness to take her tone from the circumstances and people amongst whom she was placed.

No incident happened to disturb the even tenor of our lives, except the advent of a little laughing cherub, the property of Blanche and Percy. And thus, two more years passed away; and Edith—little baby Edith—was twenty!





Art thou come at last?
A thousand welcomes!—be forgot the past;
Forgotten, all the grief that absence brings,
Fear that torments, and jealousy that stings;
All that is cold, injurious, and unkind,
Be it for ever banish'd from the mind;
And in that mind, and in that heart be now
The soft endearment, and the binding vow.

CRABBE.

Yes, I was then happy—happy and contented in the present; seldom indulging in regret for the past. Suddenly, my tranquillity was broken;—my peace of mind vanished. I heard that Oscar's brother had died, and that Oscar had sold out, and was on his way home! What hopes and fears—what memories of the past, and terror of the future—yet what anxious longing to behold once more the beloved one—did this news awaken! I should see Oscar again; his long silence—his hurried letters—might be explained, or, if there were ought to forgive, should be forgiven;—and I should once more be happy! In a month—one little month—(yet, an *age* to my anxious longing)—I should see him again;—for he would come straight here, before, even, he visited his own home! Oh! I should be happy!

The weeks flew by; the month was at an end. Then came the news, that he was at home—with his own parents; and I reproached myself with having wished him to seek *me*, first of all;—he owed his *first* duty to *them*, and it was good in him to remember it! He would soon come to me; and *then*—what a bright future lay before me! Now, for the first time, I consulted my glass, to see what ravages Time and Care had worked, upon a face and form which Oscar had thought so

beautiful. Ten years had passed, since his departure,—most of them spent in a hard struggle with the stern realities of life; and was it possible that the sorrows which had worn so deeply into my heart, had left no trace upon my brow? True, I was a mere child when he left, and now, I was twenty-six; but what a life had been mine! What deep sorrows! What sudden alternations of hope and fear! What sharp, wearing anxiety, when I had sometimes felt that I had not Faith enough to obey the command, “Cast all your care upon Him, for He careth for you!” So I turned, anxiously and fearfully, to my mirror. I was determined to cast aside vanity, and to see myself as I really was. Yet the scrutiny did not alarm me: for though the face I gazed on had a tinge of sadness that was not there when he last saw it, it had lost nothing in those merely *physical* charms which alone, I sadly felt, could bind Oscar’s affection: his heart, alas! was the slave of his *fancy*.

As we were one evening discussing Oscar’s arrival, Blanche said, laughingly:—

“I am very glad, dear Nelly, that I gave you so faithful an account of Mr. Oscar’s doings in India; for I know you would never marry a man of his character. Otherwise, I should tremble; for years, which are generally sad beauty-killers, have but *added* to *your* attractions; and I suspect that when the gentleman meets you, he will renew his old attentions—and in good earnest, too. You are really far better-looking than you were at sixteen; for you were then a child, and are now a woman. Your figure, which was then merely *pretty*, is now *splendid*—though you certainly do your best to mar its effect, by your severely primitive style of dress. (I do wish you would spend a little more on yourself, Nelly. Why *should* you hoard up all your money?) Then, your face has gained immensely in expression; for your troubles, which, had they fallen upon any one else, would have converted her into a prematurely acid old maid, have but added a tinge of softness and melancholy, which renders you irresistibly bewitching! Oh! Nelly, I should like to see you once more *en grande toilette*, instead of in that odious, plain, grey stuff, close up to your throat,—and those *horrid* boots, with soles an inch thick, which you *will* persist in wearing. Do go to the L——’s with us some evening! It would be such a treat to see you once more looking the Nelly of by-gone years!”

" Ah, Blanche ! but you forget that the attention which Miss Dudley, ' the heiress,' used to receive wherever she went, would not be shewn to Miss Dudley, ' the teacher' !"

" Why not ?" chimed in Percy. " If the ' teacher' would dress herself like a Christian, instead of like a demented heathen, she would meet with as much, or more, attention than ever. But if the ' teacher' persist in entering brilliant assemblies clad in a primitive grey silk dress, without any ornament, while others are becomingly attired in the modern fashion ;— and if the aforesaid instructress of youth place herself in a retired corner of the room, and then and there assume the appearance of an antiquated and objectionable female dragon, and obstinately refuse to hold commune with her fellow-creatures beyond the somewhat used-up, and, certainly, *not* original monosyllables, ' Yes' and ' No': — is it, I say, surprising, if the ' poor teacher' fail to attract the same admiration which was accorded to the gay and brilliant Miss Dudley, who, faultlessly attired, beaming with happiness and enjoyment, flashed like a bright meteor across the heaven of the fashionable world, and then disappeared ?"

I felt the truth of his words ; yet I could not bring myself to re-enter society on so unequal a footing as I knew would be mine, if, in my humble position, I dared to venture into it. I should but provoke the ill-natured comments, and, perhaps, ill-disguised rudeness, of many of my own sex ; for it would not be possible to conceal the truth for any length of time, nor would I, even to please Edith, palm myself off for any other than I was. I owed it to my own pride and dignity to keep strictly within my own sphere ; and so, the thick boots, the grey stuff, and independence, for me !

And thus another month passed, and it was the height of the season ; yet Oscar came not, and I felt anxious and fearful.

One Saturday evening, the L——'s carriage stopped at our door, and out sprang Edith, who, running up to my room, bounded into my arms.

" I can only stay this one night, Nelly, dear ; for the carriage is to come for me to-morrow morning."

" Why, darling ?"

" Oh ! because Oscar Herbert is in town ; and mamma, who, you know, was always very fond of him, has asked him to dine with us to-morrow, and wants me to be at home."

"And has he accepted her invitation?" I asked, with a chilled heart."

"Oh, yes; and he has dined with us many times. He is so handsome!"

"Indeed! And how long has he been in town?" (I wonder now that I could speak so calmly.)

"He has been three weeks in town, and we have seen a great deal of him. He is the handsomest man I have ever met; — so tall and handsome! Such a splendid figure! *Such* eyes! And he is so amusing and well-informed! Do you remember how fond you and he used to be of each other, when you were children at Rocklands? It would have been a good match for you, Nelly, for he will now be immensely rich!"

I clasped my brow in an intensity of anguish never known till then. "When you were children at Rocklands"! — "It would have been a good match for you"! — "He will be immensely rich"! — Did he, too, then, consider what had been the hope of my life as but a passing episode in our childish days? And his riches! How did the thought of them chafe and gall my wounded pride — my outraged affection! I felt suffocating. I rose to open the window; and fell fainting to the ground. When I awoke to consciousness, they were all bending over me in utter consternation, and questioning my sister, who had the prudence to return evasive answers, which gave them no clue to the reason of my sudden fainting. Soon I became better, and entreated them to leave me; or else, I said, I should begin to fancy myself "very ill indeed." So they left me.

No sooner were they gone, than Edith threw her arms round my neck, and, with all her old childish manner, pressed her sweet face close to mine, as she murmured: —

"Dear sister, forgive me! I did not know! Can it be possible that you love him still?"

"Edith," I answered solemnly, "I have loved him all my life; and the hope of meeting him again was the beacon that cheered me on through the storms of existence, and shed its solitary light over the wild and furious waves on which my frail bark was tossed. I thought it led to a haven of peace and security. Alas! it but lured me all the more speedily to the treacherous rocks on which my faith and hope are wrecked! Edith, ours was no childish attachment; but a

serious, earnest, and recognised engagement, which still exists !”

“Then Nelly — darling sister — take comfort; for you shall yet be his wife. But —” she added, hesitatingly, “but don’t you think you *might* cease to love him ?”

“Never ! never !” I exclaimed, with a degree of vehemence long foreign to my nature.

“Then be comforted, dearest Nelly; for all will yet be well,” she murmured, gently smoothing down my hair, and tenderly kissing me.

The next morning she returned home; and I felt miserable, for I knew that “all would” *not* “be well”; for what could now restore my old trust and confidence in the man whom, though I had ceased to *esteem*, I yet loved so blindly, as to think of marrying !

The following evening, at the conclusion of my day’s labours, I entered the sitting-room, and there found — Oscar ! Forgetting what I had heard — forgetting his long silence — his cold and altered style of writing — all — all — save that the wanderer — the loved one — had returned, I uttered his name, and sprang to his arms. Perhaps he was touched by my unguarded show of affection; perhaps he had *determined* to act as he then did. However, he gently placed me on the sofa, and, taking my hands, gazed into my face, saying —

“Still the same beautiful eyes, which I have thought of through all these years, dear Nelly !”

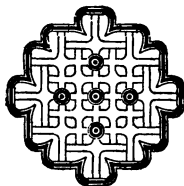
And there we sat for hours, talking over past times, and of all that had happened since we parted, till at last he left, promising to “come again soon,” and gently pressing a kiss upon my brow.

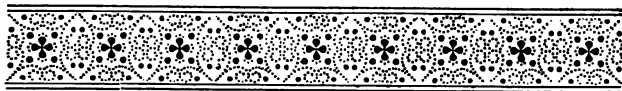
I had been very happy while he was with me; but when he was gone, a feeling of anxiety and disappointment took possession of me. His manner, though tender and affectionate, did not bespeak the ardent, impetuous love of old times; it was the gentle, unimpassioned affection of a brother — not that of an affianced *husband*. Yet in the latter position he evidently considered himself; for he had asked me if I would still be his wife, and I had tremblingly replied that I would. He had not explained his coldness and neglect, nor the long interval between his letters — and while he was with me, I was too happy to think of it; but now, it all recurred to me with terrible force. Yet when I dwelt, in memory, upon the

noble form on which I had just gazed with such fond admiring love, I could not wonder if all the flattery and admiration he *must* have met with had a *little* estranged him from me.

"For," I added, mentally, "men are not as *we* are; **they are all** wanting in our clinging tenacity of affection."

"*All*?" nay, I was unjust! But that night I **sleep** peacefully, feeling that a happy life was before me.





XLV

O, 'tis too true! how smart
A lash that speech doth give my conscience!

HAMLET.

My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
And every tongue brings in a several tale,
And every tale condemns me for a villain!

RICHARD III.

OSCAR called again in a few days; but Blanche and Percy were in the room, so that we were not alone. However, he wrote to me next day — a kind, affectionate note, expressing his regret at not having been able to talk to me. The next time he called, they were out, so we had an ample opportunity for conversation, and I hoped that he would speak more definitively as to our marriage; but no, this time he made no allusion to it, and his manner, throughout that whole interview, betrayed so plainly that his thoughts were absent, that when, after spending one short hour with me, he rose to depart, saying, that he had an engagement, but would return next day, I made no effort to detain him; but, with a courage almost beyond my strength, quietly bade him farewell.

The next day he came not, but wrote a short and hurried note to excuse himself on the plea of an unavoidable engagement. And this continued for a month. When he came, he did not seem at his ease; he often rose and walked to the window; and long, awkward pauses frequently occurred. I saw, with an agony of dread, each day more intense, that Oscar no longer loved me — or if he did, it was not with the old passionate love which alone could chain *him* to any woman. I began to feel, with a sort of shrinking horror, that I must reject him, or he would desert me; and yet I felt all the while

that, were I once his *wife*, I could make him love me more than ever; for he would then see me once more in my own natural sphere, courted, admired, and flattered;—not the poor humble teacher, unknown, or only known to be set aside.

"Nelly," said Blanche, one day, "are you going to Lady L——'s next reception?"

"No," I replied; "why should I?"

"Because it will be more than usually brilliant, and because we are going, and it would be so nice for you to go with us; for Oscar will be sure to be there, and it will be just like old times."

"No," I replied; "I don't wish to afford the expense of a new dress."

Her words rang in my ears—"Oscar will be there!" and I felt a strange longing to be where he was. I thought more and more of it. Yes—I would go! Oscar should see me, with beauty unimpaired—nay, heightened by every accessory that could be procured. He should again see me—not as the humble teacher, in her homely dress, and simple dwelling—but as Nelly Dudley of old times—gay, brilliant, surrounded by admirers, and dressed as gracefully—nay, as expensively—as any one he would meet in Lady L——'s magnificent salons. I felt that thus alone could I win back the affection which had wandered—thus alone could I chain that selfish, wordly heart; and, the next day, with an anxiety as to my appearance, which, till then, I had not known, I consulted the most celebrated *modiste* of the day, resolved to leave no stone unturned, to regain what was more precious to me than life—as necessary as the very air I breathed. During all this time, I had not seen Edith. I imagined that she feared to intrude, thinking that Oscar would always be with me; and I therefore resolved to call, a few evenings after, at the L——'s, and scold her for fancying that *any one* could supply the place of my little darling sister.

I did so, when the servant informed me that Lord and Lady L—— were dining out, and that my sister, who was not very well, had remained at home. Anxiously I ran up stairs, and gently opened the drawing-room door. To my astonishment, I found her seated with Oscar. They did not hear me enter, and were talking in low, whispering tones. I felt a sharp pang—a terrible suspicion; but I banished it immediately, feeling ashamed of having entertained it; and, advancing, pronounced her name.

"Edith!"

They both started violently; and, had I not been *determined* to think no evil, I should have seen that they were terribly confused. Oscar spoke, first rising, however, and taking my hands in his, with the utmost apparent cordiality.

"Oh, Nelly! I am so glad you have come! We were just then talking of you—were we not, Edith?"

"Yes," answered my sister, in a low voice, without raising her eyes. Why did she blush so painfully? Alas! I was blind. I thought she felt embarrassed—perhaps, *de trop*—at being in the room with Oscar and myself; and I was confirmed in my impression, by her shortly rising to leave the room.

"Nay, Edith darling," I said tenderly, "do not go; for I am here for a short time, only. I have come to scold you for neglecting me for the last month. They told me you were not very well, and I was quite alarmed; but I have never seen you looking better!"

"To tell the truth," stammered Edith, with a desperate attempt at self-possession, "I do not like the Blewet's (where papa and mamma are dining), and therefore made a little excuse to stay at home."

"By the bye, that reminds me," exclaimed Oscar, starting up; "I have an engagement, and ought to have left half-an-hour ago. I just called in here on my way, for a book which I had left. Goodbye, Nelly. Goodbye, Edith, child!"

And, warmly shaking hands with me, and but just playfully touching Edith's little finger, he left.

He had promised to spend the evening with me; but I had that morning received a note from him, to the effect that he was unavoidably engaged. His departure took a weight from my heart, for I saw that he really *had* an engagement; and I went home, all the happier for having seen my darling, and for having spoken to Oscar, though but for a moment.

I returned home, on the following afternoon, much earlier than usual, and found two letters awaiting me—*both* from Oscar. One was to say, that he would look in, for a few minutes, that evening. The other—ah! that other seemed to chill the very marrow in my bones—to turn my heart to ice—to make my brain seethe and boil, almost to madness!—for it proved him to be a villain, heartless and selfish, beyond aught that could be conceived!

The first letter began—"Dear Nelly," and was written in a quiet, friendly tone, which *would* have pained me, had I not, of late, become accustomed to it. The other—*misdirected to me*, was as follows:—

"Edith,—by confessing that you love me, you have given me the right to address you. Would to Heaven your sister had not arrived last night, just at the moment when you had uttered that enchanting avowal! for I would have compelled you to repeat it, until the dear confession should have thrilled my soul, almost to madness! Oh, Edith!—dearest—best loved! never before have I known the bliss—the rapture—which now threatens to subdue my very reason, and which renders me powerless to express, as I fain would do, all my deep gratitude for the happiness you have given, or to discuss calmly with you what is the best—that is, the most just and merciful way of acting.

"For the sake of her whose pride will perhaps be wounded by too sudden an avowal of the truth, we must not be *too* straightforward. You confess, that if I were not engaged to your sister, you would accept me. Oh! believe me, the engagement—as you call it—is a mere empty form;—and would it not be a folly and a crime, to persist in uniting *hands*, where the *hearts* are sundered? Should I make her happy, if I were to marry her, while my heart is devoted to *you*? I am not suited to her, nor is she to me. We were thrown together in childhood, and fancied we were in love. I left for India; and a few letters passed between us; and, at your request, I called on her after my return. Yet that meeting, and subsequent ones, have been purely friendly, I assure you; nor do I believe that she entertains for me any other feeling than that of sisterly regard. But, even were it otherwise, I *could not* marry her; for I can never love her, except as *your sister*; and, were she to become my wife, I could not make her happy. Believe me—I have tried to feel for her, as I did in former days; but in vain! Oh, Edith! you *say* you love me! By so doing you have—pardon me!—given me the greatest encouragement; and you cannot, *in honor*, reject me! I do beseech you, for your sister's sake—for your own—dare I say, *for mine*?—to listen to my suit!—for you must—you *shall* be my wife! Edith—you are

the one bright vision that has flashed across the unpeopled desert of my imagination, which has hitherto been a dreary void, unfilled by what it thirsted after !

"I cannot see you this evening; but I shall meet you to-morrow night, — and, in the crowd, we can be as *solitary* as you please. Think, and decide. If that decision be in my favor, wear on your neck the small coral heart which I gave you the other day; if I see it there, I shall approach you: — if not, we shall never meet again ! Oh ! be merciful; for my fate is in your hands !

"OSCAR."

I did not faint, nor weep. An unnatural calm had fallen upon me. All my senses seemed preternaturally sharpened. I must *act* — yes, or I should go mad !

While reading that letter, my love for the treacherous writer had ceased as entirely as though it had never been. And for *her*, what were my feelings? I know not. I tried not to think of *her*, lest I should become un-nerved, and unfit for action. Should I destroy this letter, and thus crush Oscar's hopes? — for unless she received it, she would not wear the coral heart, and he would leave her. Yet how, in that case, should I have any assurance that my sister would not have resisted this temptation? Oh ! she would ! she would ! and then, though *he* was lost to me for ever, I should still have my other treasure left to me !

Calmly re-folding the letter, I placed it in another envelope, and then carefully and laboriously directed it to her, in Oscar's hand-writing, which, alas ! was but too familiar to me; then, as it was still early, I took it myself, to the post-office near the hotel at which Oscar was staying, that the strange post-mark might not excite her wonder. This done, I returned home, and dressed carefully; then, still in the same unnatural state of calm, I joined Percy and Blanche, down stairs.

After tea, we were sitting there, talking, when Oscar entered. His manner was as natural and unembarrassed as usual; and mine was the counterpart of his. There was another ring at the bell, and in walked — Mr. Percival ! — the good, upright, unselfish man, whose love — which, I now saw, too late, would have been a priceless treasure — I had rejected for that of the shallow hypocrite whose perfidy I had just discovered. With a cry of joy, I sprang to meet him.

"Oh ! I am so glad to see you — so glad !" and my voice

faltered, and the tears rose to my eyes. "It is so *long* since you have been here!" and a deep and heavy sigh escaped me.

Taking my hands, he looked anxiously in my face, saying,—
"Why, Nelly, what is this? What fresh trouble has befallen you? I thought you were cheerful and happy; and so I told Oscar, who was asking after you, at M——."

"Ah!" I replied, smiling mournfully, "I believe I have been rather overworked of late;—this life of toil does not agree with me; I was brought up to an idle life, and don't settle down easily to my work!"

"Well," interrupted Percy, "it's your own fault, dear Nell! You might have married—over and over again,—aye, and married well, too! You might have been surrounded by all the luxury you could fancy; but you *would* not. Even now, if you would only re-enter society, you would have but to choose? Why have you not married?"

"Because," I replied, slowly and deliberately,—for I knew that each of my words would be like a sharp goad to the heart of him for whom they were intended,— "because I have been engaged for some years. I promised to remain faithful, through every trial and temptation! I promised, that neither years, absence, nor affliction, should wean my heart from *him*! And that vow I have kept, no less as an obligation, sacred in the sight of God, than as a *point of honor*, even more binding—alas!—in that of men!"

I glanced at Oscar. My words had told! His eyes were cast down, and his lips moved nervously. He was evidently writhing under a deep sense of shame and unworthiness.

"And *he*?" asked Percy.

My face lighted up. I felt as if a scorching flame were at my heart. I answered, almost fiercely—

"Should I have taken that vow, had I not felt as great confidence in *his* honor, as in my own? Should I have kept it—through trials and temptations such as fell not to *his* share? Should I have allowed it to condemn me, for long, sickening years, to a life, laborious in itself, goading to my pride—at variance with every feeling of my nature;—and, if he had at last deserted me, to ruined prospects? Ah no! Yet, for *his* sake, I would have done more! I would have endured beggary—starvation—death!"

Carried away by my enthusiasm, I had forgotten *all*—all

save the memory of the love that had endured through all those dark and troubled years — a lifetime, as they seemed to me!

Oscar sprang forward, and seizing my hands, exclaimed, in accents of passionate admiration —

“By Heavens! you are a glorious creature! I never beheld you so beautiful!”

They all gazed in astonishment. My heart was filled with triumph. *Half* my conquest was achieved; and for the rest——. Restored to myself, I only replied, with a gentle smile,—

“Why, Oscar, my old friend—are *you* turning flatterer?”

“Ah!” said Percy, “but he is right; and the man who could betray *such* love, would be a villain indeed!”

“Well,” I said, “we will descend from the heroics if you please. When did you arrive in town, Mr. Percival?”

“I have been in town a week, and must return to M—— the day after to-morrow. I shall be at the L——s’ to-morrow evening. Will you be there?”

“Yes.”

(A glance of mingled surprise, delight, and perplexity, from Oscar).

Mr. Percival continued. “I have taken a bed at the inn here, to-night; so, if Percy and Blanche are going, we may as well go *en masse*.”

“Agreed,” said Percy.

Soon after, Oscar rose. As he prepared to depart, he said, laughingly,—

“I have a secret to tell you, Nelly. Just come out for a moment!”

I did so, and he drew me to the door, and into the little garden. The moon shone down upon us, bathing us in her silver radiance, as she had done when—ten years before—she had witnessed our youthful vows! He folded me in his arms; and I shrank not, outwardly, from the loathed embrace. He kissed me; and it was the kiss of *old times*—of the boy Oscar, at Rocklands! He murmured, in deep, loving tones,—

“Nelly—my darling! my *wife*! Mine ever! till death!”

And as I stood there, in the pale, calm moonbeams, with the still, night air around me—*so* still, and soft, and unlike the wild storm that was raging in my heart!—and as I watched the receding form, till it was lost in the darkness, I denounced the double-dyed villain—traitor to *both* of us—since

he had won *her* heart as well as mine ! I knew, that no feeling of *penitence* had won him back to me; it was but the effect of Percy's words,—aided by my temporary show of spirit, which had for a moment restored to me the beauty and animation of former days. I knew that he was as shallow and heartless as man could be; and yet I felt my power to punish him,—if not through his *affection*, at least through his *pride*!

The next evening, I entered our little sitting-room — the Eleanor of old times. A white satin robe, made to perfection, fell in rich folds that swept the ground. I wore, for ornaments, a splendid set of diamonds and rubies, which had belonged to my own mother, and with which I would never part. My throat was enriched by a small string of diamonds, of splendid brilliancy, from which hung a ruby cross; on my arms were a similar set, and a brooch and pendant of the same completed my attire. My hair was drawn back, as in my mother's picture, and was entirely without ornament.

Percy and Blanche uttered an exclamation of delight at my appearance; but Mr. Percival was silent; and, as he folded my white mantle around me, he sighed.

We entered the splendidly lighted rooms, and I glanced anxiously round for my sister. At last I saw her, as usual, the centre of attraction. I looked but once; — it was enough. She, too, was false! — she, this serpent, whom I had nursed and cherished till it was strong enough to sting me to the heart! How I longed to snatch from her neck the glaring evidence of her perfidy! — to save her, yet! Nay — I would — I must — make one last effort!

I sat down beside her, and took her hand. I felt that it might be for the last time; and my voice was gentler and more affectionate than usual.

“Edith, darling, will you give me that heart, and take this ruby cross in exchange? Mine is far handsomer, and I should like you to have it. I would not give it to any one but you, my pet, for it belonged to my poor mother; but to you, my little sister, what would I *not* give!”

She withdrew her hand, and answered, rather impatiently —

“No, Nelly; I cannot part with that heart! I value it particularly.”

“Not even to please *me*, Edith? Ah! when did I ever refuse *you* anything? And I never asked a favour of you till

now ! I have taken a great fancy to that heart. Do let me wear it for just this *one* evening !”

“ I will *not*, Nelly !— and I do wish you would not sit so *very* close to me ! Sisterly affection is all very well in its way, but it should not be paraded before others !”

I sighed deeply. Suddenly, the fretful, impatient look vanished, and was replaced by one of delight and expectation. I knew that Oscar was in the room ! He advanced to where we were sitting. That moment was one of intense harrowing anxiety. I marked them both, and felt that I had triumphed — that Oscar was mine ! His glance first rested — and with what an intensity of surprise and admiration ! — on me ; then it reverted, for an instant, to Edith ; and then returned to me, with a depth of passionate tenderness and devotion, such as I had never before seen. I marked *her* — the traitress ! — the undisguised look of affection with which she greeted his approach ; then the disappointment — the humiliation — the utter bewilderment — which succeeded, as Oscar, giving me his arm, and gently pressing the hand which rested on it, led me away. He drew me into a conservatory, dimly lighted by pale lamps, which, like glimmering stars, peeped out here and there from among the rich foliage, and shed their faint, mild lustre on us, as we sat there. And then, while soft strains of music and the distant hum of voices, floated gently through the perfumed air, I listened, with sealed heart, to words of passionate tenderness, such as in his boyish love had never fallen from his lips. He told me that not even in the old happy time had he loved me as now ; — that my childish beauty, which had fascinated his young untried heart, had been but the dawn of the perfect loveliness which now dazzled and bewildered him.

“ Oh, Nelly ! never have I loved as I do now ! All attractions are poor and weak when placed in competition with yours ! Not even your *sister's* loveliness can bear the test ! And, to think,” he added, rapturously, “ to think that this glorious prize has been reserved for *me* ! Oh ! Nelly, say — when, *when* will you give me the right to shew the world that such a treasure is mine ? With what pride — what exultation — shall I call you ‘ my wife ! ’ ”

I told him that he should know my decision on the following evening ; and we then moved into the next room, where Oscar was soon but one of the many who crowded round me. Ah !

that capricious gift of beauty, which till then I had never valued! — how I now gloried in its possession! How I hated and despised *him* — the traitor! the selfish, mean, despicable villain, whose love so depended on the mere *externals* of life that it could not be won by devotion such as mine, if garbed in poverty and obscurity! Oscar never left my side, and although evidently delighted at the admiration I received, seemed annoyed that he had no further opportunity of speaking with me alone. At last I was asked to sing, and at Oscar's request selected the beautiful air, "Ah! non giunge." When I rose from the piano, I was again solicited for a song, and as I sat down and ran my fingers lightly over the keys, while irresolute what to choose, I heard Edith say, in a low tone, to Oscar —

"Poor Nelly! she *ought* to sing well! it is her profession! This is a good advertisement for her!"

Oscar made no answer, and was turning away in disgust; but I marked the ungenerous taunt, and the sneering tone in which it was uttered, and, with all the worst feelings of my bitterly crushed heart aroused, I asked Oscar if he still remembered "Qual cor tradisti," which we used to sing together, and if he would now accompany me in it.

Willingly he complied; and as I reproached him — *him*, this second Pollio — in the words of the Druid Priestess, I forgot the place — the surrounding listeners — *all*, save that he, the cruel, false one was before me; and as, amidst the actual *applause* which, in the excitement and enthusiasm of the moment, burst forth at the conclusion of the song, I rose from the piano, I felt faint and giddy, and hastily placing my hand within the arm of Mr. Percival, whispered —

"Take me hence! I must have air! I cannot breathe!"

He half led, half supported me, to the conservatory, and, opening a window, admitted the cool fresh air; and as it fanned my heated brow, I felt better, and drew a long, heavy sigh.

"My poor child! What is it? What is the matter? Nay, there *is* something; all this night have you been in an unnatural state of excitement! Nelly, you are assailed by some great and harrowing trial! Have you prayed to the only One who can aid you, to lead you safely through it?"

An impatient gesture was my only reply.

"Ah! Nelly, be more true to yourself! Tell me what feeling is now uppermost in your thoughts."

"Hatred !" I answered, between my set teeth. "Deep, deadly hatred ! and a thirst for revenge, which I can, and *will*, have !"

"No, you will not !" he answered, in calm, decided tones.

"And why ?" I asked, in utter amazement.

"Because, by so doing you would forfeit the protection and favour of the Almighty ! Because you would be ungrateful to your poor aunt, who taught you to be good, and gentle, and forgiving, and to obey God's commands, and consider *His* will before your own !"

"Ah ! Aunt Mary — dear Aunt Mary !" I exclaimed, despairingly ; "would that she were with me still, to love me ! No one cares for me ! I am so desolate and alone !"

"My dear Nelly," he answered, tenderly clasping my hand, "we are none of us *alone*, while we have God for our friend ; and *you* will never be without earthly friends also, poor child !"

I was softened, and replied —

"And *you* are the best and dearest of them ! Tell me — what must I do ?"

"Go home, my dear Nelly, and pray to God to soften your heart. You must indeed have gone through a sore trial, ere *you* could be so ruffled ! I will see you again to-morrow ; for I will not leave you till you are calmer."

"Ah ! my kind friend !" I answered, pressing his hand reverently to my lips, "what do I not owe you ! I have indeed passed through a sharp trial. Some day I may tell you — but not now — not now !"

We then sought Percy and Blanche, and found them talking with Oscar, who, the moment he saw me, offered me his arm, to lead me out ; and, as he bent over my hand, at parting, and murmured, "God bless you, dearest ! To-morrow evening, remember !" I was reminded of old days, and wept silently.

That night I sought for help from Him who has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee ;" and my heart was softened. Before I lay down to rest, I wrote these few lines to Oscar :—

"Dear Oscar,

"To save you the pain of an interview, I write to say, that I have well considered your words, and have

decided that I cannot be your wife. To give you my reasons, would only be to pain you unnecessarily. Do not, I beseech you, attempt to shake my resolution; for it is unalterable. You are free."

This note I despatched the next morning, and then went through my daily toil with a lighter heart; for I felt that I was now acting, not from resentment, but from a feeling of what was due to myself. I no longer either esteemed or loved Oscar; and his faithlessness absolved me from all duty to him.

On my return home I found Mr. Percival, who had come to see me before his departure. He did not stay long; but his presence soothed and cheered me; and, when he rose to depart, I clung to his hand, saying wistfully, "*Must* you go?"

"I must, my child; but I will write to you. Farewell. God bless you!"

Gently he laid his hand upon my head, and, sighing, turned away.

When he was gone, I lay down in utter weariness of body and mind, and thought over the events of the last few days. Percy and Blanche were out this evening; and I was not sorry to be alone, for I sadly wanted quiet.

Soon, however, there was a ring at the bell; and Oscar, in fearful excitement, rushed into the room.

"Nelly—what means this—this sudden change? Who has been setting you against me? Has Edith—has Blanche—told you anything to influence you against me?"

I replied as calmly as I could; for I was terrified at his violence.

"No, Oscar; I have judged for myself."

"Then why—I don't for a moment suppose you are in earnest—but *why* do you say you will not be my wife?"

"Because, Oscar, I do not love you!"

"You do not mean it! You *cannot* mean it!" he replied vehemently. "You yourself confessed that you loved me all the time I was away! What should make you change so suddenly?"

"Be calm, Oscar; or I must leave you. It is true that I loved you through all those long, weary years of absence. I loved you as the impulsive, and, I thought, warm-hearted companion of my childhood. But you tried my love sadly, by your fickleness and neglect; and, for years before you

returned, I felt that your affection was not proof against time and absence. You made me anxious and unhappy, Oscar; and my trust in you was shaken. But, worse than all, when you *did* return, you allowed many weeks to elapse before you sought me; and then——” (I struggled for composure; for the memory of all that I had so lately suffered well-nigh unnerved me). “When, at last, you came, I saw that even the small remnant of affection which had survived was chilled and shocked, by your finding me in poverty—clad in a homely garb—labouring for my daily bread! You should have remembered *why* you found me thus! that, but for my fidelity to you, I might have been in the same position as of old! and, had you possessed the noble, generous heart which I most falsely attributed to you—and for which, *alone*, I loved you—you *would* have remembered it! The last evening you were here I chose to remind you of this, while, at the same time, your dormant sense of honour was alarmed by the keen, though unintended, censure of others. I saw that the praise or blame of the world was more to you than all my untiring devotion and self-sacrifice; and I *despised* you! Last night I appeared before you as the brilliant, admired belle of former times; and I then saw, and felt, that it was my *beauty*, not *myself*, in *mind* and *heart*, that you had loved! And with that knowledge, and the accompanying conviction of your unworthiness—yes, your *unworthiness*—for numerous instances of your utter want of moral strength, have reached my ears—my love for you has ceased; nor could the devotion of a lifetime win it back!”

I spoke calmly, but decidedly; and he saw that there was no hope; yet he threw himself at my feet, and entreated me not so *utterly* to reject him—not to abandon him to such hopeless despair as must be his if he lost me. He implored me to award him *any* penance—to set before him *any* ordeal, however trying; but to give him some hope that, by untiring assiduity and patience, he might win me at last. Finding me immovable, he at last pleaded—

“Have mercy! Have mercy! You know not to *what* a fate you condemn me! If you reject me, I must—I am bound in honor—I must wed another! I am pledged to her, if *you* set me free! And I feel that none but you can fill my heart; for no other possesses such intellect and goodness! Oh, I know you now; and I feel, in my very soul, that your *beauty*

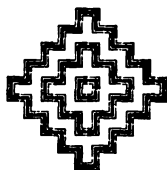
is but the *least* of your attractions—the costly setting to the priceless gem! Oh, hear me! Have pity on me!”

But I answered quietly—

“No, Oscar; I have told you that your conduct has entirely destroyed my affection. We cannot *compel* the inclinations, and my heart can never again be yours; nor will I wed where I cannot *esteem* as well as *love*. If you have acted so dishonourably as you say, and have pledged yourself to another while bound in honour to me, you must even reap the fruits of your treachery; I cannot sacrifice myself to save you! Go, Oscar; for I can give you no hope. Oh! may God, in His mercy, teach you to see your error, and give you a better heart!”

He rose, and, with a slow and heavy step, left me.

For a while I heard nothing of him; then came a wretched, despairing appeal to my pity—an entreaty for pardon. I wrote to him kindly, assured him of my forgiveness, and promised that I would try to regard him with *friendship*; but, at the same time, I forbade his indulging any hope of my ever entertaining for him a warmer feeling; for that was impossible. For weeks he continued to write; but I returned no answer to his letters. He called; but was not admitted. For some months I heard no more of him. Then I received a letter from Lady L——, who was at her country-seat. She said that Oscar was staying with them, that he had proposed for Edith, and that they were shortly to be married.





Come, is the bride ready to go to Church?
ROMEO AND JULIET.

SUMMER — Autumn — Winter — had passed, and it was on a lovely morning in Spring that I awoke in the splendid room in which I had passed the night; for this was Edith's wedding morning, and I had availed myself of Lady L——'s invitation to sleep at her house, that I might be there to deck my sister in her bridal dress.

How lovely she was, in her pure, white robe, and long, flowing veil! As I pressed her to my heart, and tremblingly uttered the words, "God bless my darling Edith!" I felt that my cheek was wet with tears, not my own.

"Nay, dearest, you must not weep; or Oscar will think you are not happy!"

"Oh! Nelly — tell me again, that you did not love him! Tell me, that you would have been unhappy as his wife!"

"Indeed I should, my little incredulous darling. I changed my mind; — ladies have the right to do so you know, Edie, for they are proverbially capricious. Besides, I could not bear such a life as suits him. I would rather live very quietly and simply, caring for nothing but my husband's love. A quiet life, for me! And now we must go down stairs, for they expect us."

But she still lingered, and seemed as if she wished to say something. At last, throwing her arms round my neck, she sobbed forth —

"Oh! Nelly, Nelly! My dear, dear sister! God bless you! God bless you, sister Nelly! I have been so ungrate-

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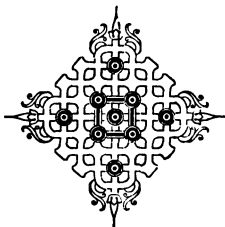
ful — oh! *so* ungrateful! — and I feel it all, now that I am going to leave you! I shall often think of you, my sister Nelly; and, whenever I do wrong, your dear, kind, anxious face will appear in memory before me, and will — as it has often done — make me sorry for my fault; — nay, perhaps save me from committing it! Bless you — bless you — my dearest sister, for all your love and care!"

How like she was to the "little Edie" of "long, long ago," — the innocent darling of my childhood!

"Come, dearest," I answered gaily; "you must not be crying on your wedding morning! — And — naughty child that you are! — you have disarranged your veil, which I took such pains to render becoming. — There, now it is all right again; so we will go down stairs!"

* * * *

I stood with them before God's altar. I heard her tremblingly pronounce the solemn, awful, marriage vow. It was over. I had folded her in my arms, and blessed her, — and she was gone!





How much have cost us the evils that have never happened!
JEFFERSON.

Quiet thyself until time try the truth; and it may be that
thy fear will prove greater than thy misfortune.
SOUTHWELL.

THEY were absent twelve months on their wedding-tour, travelling over a great part of the Continent. I heard frequently from Edith, who always wrote as if she were very happy; and I trusted, that, as my sister had now a serious object in life, she would settle down to more worthy pursuits than those which had hitherto occupied her butterfly existence: and, in the contemplation of her happiness, I tried to forget the past, and not to mourn over my own ruined hopes. But the task was a hard one; for though my love for Oscar had, as I had told him, ceased with the knowledge of his unworthiness, I had so long been accustomed to dwell in secret upon that romance of my life, and to look forward to the time when my devotion should meet its reward, that my existence now seemed to have lost all aim and purpose, and all charm. And, added to the loss of all that I had so prized, was the thought, that, for what now proved so utterly worthless, I had cast aside a far happier lot, — I had rejected the substance for the shadow; — and it was too late!

I found my chief pleasure in the society of Blanche and Percy, whose affectionate kindness to me was unremitting. It was so pretty, to see those two young, simple creatures, playing with the little blue-eyed Constance; Blanche, with her slight, girlish figure, and youthful features, looking more like the

sister, than the mother, of that little, fragile atom of humanity — the object of so much anxious love. They seemed, those two, as if they had discovered the secret of perpetual youth; for their cheerful faces, and light, ringing voices, had remained untouched by Time, which had brought nothing but peace and tranquillity to them, while to me — But I thanked God, that, as I believed, my worst trial was ended, and that I, too, should have peace. Yet *my* heart had grown old in suffering and disappointment, while *theirs* were still fresh and young as when, children, we had played together at Rocklands.

Rocklands! — and the old time! It was fading away from my memory, and I was glad; for when, sometimes, in a dream, I fancied myself once more amongst the beloved scenes, I awoke in tears; and the thought of that dream would haunt me for days, shedding its mournful influence over all. No more did I gaze with fond, though saddened, remembrance on the pictures in my little room; for I felt that to do so would unfit me for the stern realities of life, and for the daily routine of toil, which was certainly so far beneficial to me, that it left little time for the indulgence of vain regrets for past happiness.

A few days after my sister's marriage, I had resolutely destroyed every vestige of the past, as connected with Oscar. His letters, his miniature, and a few other things, first fell a sacrifice; and their destruction cost me nothing beyond a few natural tears of regret, at thus annihilating what I had carefully treasured, until I had learnt to regard them as objects of inestimable value. Then, I took down the small painted box in which, since I had received it, had been deposited the little fruit-knife, which Oscar had given me the night of the child's party; but when that too was to be destroyed, the memory of that happy evening — of the merry children, in their gay dresses — of the ringing laughter — the glowing faces — the little eager voices; — of the music — the lights — the garlands of flowers; — and of Oscar, then a fine, generous boy, unspoilt by the world, — unskilled in its treacherous wiles, and with only the *germs* of evil in his heart; — as it all recurred to me — floating in melancholy light through the dim mirror of my saddened thoughts — saddened by years of weary, sickening disappointment; — I felt that I could not destroy this last memento of that happy time: and, restoring

the little keepsake to its resting-place, I turned away, and wept bitterly.

But, as I said, I was becoming reconciled to my lot, and was gradually learning to forget that I had ever been other than the poor, quiet teacher, patiently going my daily rounds, and returning in the evening to have pleasant talks with my two companions. We heard all the M—— news from Minnie Crosier, who often wrote to Blanche, in terms which left no doubt in our minds as to the happiness of her lot. Amy, she said, was dear to her as her own two little darlings; and she dreaded parting with her, as she must do very soon—for Amy was going to be married. Amy Crosier married! "*Little Amy*," as we used to call her! It seemed very strange—yet not more so than that "*little Edie*" was already a wife!

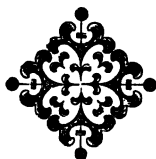
"The amiable Florence," Blanche wrote, "is still in single blessedness; but, Frederic tells me, is setting her cap at Mr. Percival. She visits his school, gives money to his poor people, and so manages, that, wherever he may go, he meets her at every step. I hope he sees through her, and will not fall a victim to the wiles of the fascinating charmer; yet I fear for him, for when Frederic joked him about her, he looked grave, and said, that it would ill become him to find fault with the young lady's conduct, if that conduct benefited the poor; and that he had no right to suppose that it sprang from any but a good motive: that, as to her, with her large fortune, entertaining designs upon the heart of a poor clergyman, it was absurd!—and so on."

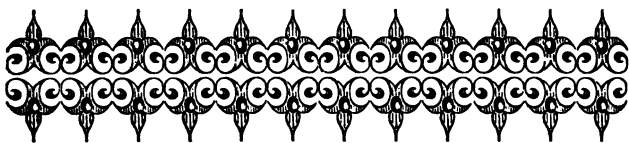
This letter gave me an uneasy sensation—I knew not why. I did not think that Florence was the sort of person to fascinate Mr. Percival; yet I knew his devotion to his calling, his love for his poor; and I feared that, for their sakes alone, he regretted not being rich, since he often found himself compelled to witness necessities at which his heart ached, but which he had not the power to alleviate. What might not Florence's wealth do in the little village! What sickness and want might it not relieve! What heavy hearts might it not lighten, and raise with gratitude towards the one great Author of all good! I had often heard him say, that an unmarried clergyman could not do so much good as one who had a wife, whose gentle, feminine offices were even more needful, in cases of mere temporal distress, than his. I felt disquieted; for I knew him, and his generous, unselfish nature; and I feared,

that if he believed Florence to be sincere in her kindness to the poor, and if he thought that she was an estimable person, and one in whom he would find a quiet friend and companion, and a helper in his labours,—I feared that he would marry her. Yet why—I asked myself—*should* I fear? What was it to me? I replied, that I loved Mr. Percival as a dear old friend; and that I did not like the thought of losing him, as I should do if he married—and, above all, if he married Florence, whom I did not like. (Ah! the heart is deceitful above all things; for sometimes—nay, very often—it deceives even itself.) So I felt uneasy, and dissatisfied with Mr. Percival, and with Florence, and with Minnie and Sir Frederic, and with Blanche and Percy—lastly, and most of all, with *myself*; and I did not write to Mr. Percival for a long time.

Twelve months had now elapsed, since Edith's departure; and, one spring evening, I was seated with the L——s awaiting the young couple, in their house in Arlington Street. Often did we say, breathlessly, "They are coming! they are coming!" and as often were we disappointed.

At last, a travelling-carriage drove rapidly round the corner. It stopped at the door. In another moment, my darling, her sweet face radiant with health and happiness, was in my arms!





Her heart was formed to softness — warped to wrong.
THE CORSAIR.

I HAD hoped that marriage would have given a steadier tone to my sister's mind, but I was disappointed; for she now plunged into gaiety with an eager, unabated enjoyment, that alarmed me. I rarely saw her; for whenever I called in the evening, she was either out, or preparing to go; and when she *was* at home, it was at her own receptions, where I should have had no opportunity of conversing with her if I had attended them, which I did not do. I was grieved; for I thought that such ought not to be the commencement of her married life. I feared that her affection for her husband would gradually become weakened by this excessive course of gaiety, and that her head would be completely turned by the adulation which surrounded her on all sides. Alas! I little thought *what* power flattery had over her weak and vacillating heart, or I should have watched her more carefully than I did; yet I thought that her husband was now her proper mentor, and that if *he* was satisfied, I had no right to complain. But Oscar was the last person to find fault with his wife's love of excitement; for he himself was anything but a quiet domestic character. Besides, he was so proud of her beauty, which had, if anything, increased since her marriage, that he liked to display it everywhere, and to have it said that "Mrs. Oscar Herbert was the finest woman in town." So I made no attempt to advise Edith; and the season was drawing to a close.

One evening, Percy and Blanche induced me to accompany

them to one of Edith's parties. I saw her surrounded by a group of men — some of them the most noted *roués* about town. I should have felt annoyed and insulted, had they treated me with half the freedom with which they addressed her. Not so Edith, who laughed and talked with the most perfect *abandon*, seeming to regard these people as her most intimate friends. I felt grieved and mortified, and resolved seriously to warn my sister; and I was further strengthened in my purpose by what I overheard of a conversation between two married ladies beside me, who, unaware of my relationship to Edith, indulged in the free expression of their opinions regarding her conduct.

"It is lamentable," said the first, "to see that beautiful creature so utterly forgetful of her own dignity, and of her position as a wife, as to associate so freely with those men!"

"Yes," said the other; "and they attend her everywhere — in the parks, in Rotten Row, at *fêtes* — concerts — the opera! Scandal is already busy with her name. I myself saw one of them kiss her hand! It was last night, at Mrs. Seymour's; they were in the conservatory, and did not know I was by."

"And did she *allow* it?"

"Oh! she withdrew her hand, certainly; but instead of expressing anger, she only blushed, and looked exquisitely lovely: and I have to-night remarked that that man is honoured with a great share of her attention. She must be terribly vain and fond of admiration, to be so utterly forgetful of what she owes to herself and her husband!"

All this while, a horrid man on the other side of me had been pouring into my ear a string of nothings, which I, deeply absorbed in the conversation I have narrated, answered at random, and, no doubt, wide of the mark. I felt sick at heart at the — alas! I feared, *deserved* — censure passed on my sister by those who, while they so unreservedly condemned her conduct, were glad enough to be admitted into her house. My eyes wandered to where she sat, radiantly beautiful, — her bright, innocent face up-turned towards those men, whose open undisguised admiration, mingled with a certain freedom of manner, made me *hate* them. My companion's eyes followed the direction taken by mine.

"Ah! you are looking at Mrs. Herbert; — a pretty woman; — but, as a *wife*, defend me from her! She is going the pace; and her husband must be blind not to see it. He had better

take care, or his illusion will be dispelled in a way he little thinks; for the world is already busy with her name."

"Sir," I coldly interrupted, "I am her *sister*!"

Overcome with surprise and confusion, he was for a moment silent; then, in an altered tone, he resumed:—

"Pardon me! I was not aware of it, and am sincerely grieved to have offended you. Yet, believe me, all that I have said is *true*—too true; and I advise you, if you have any influence with your sister, to exert it for her good, and to warn her ere it be too late."

Before leaving, I asked my sister at what time she could see me for an hour alone. She replied, that she would be disengaged the next afternoon. But this her satellites vehemently opposed, declaring that they should expect her in the park.

"Well, then, to-morrow evening," she said.

No, they urged; the opera would be unusually good; and, after that, would be Lady Melton's *soirée*, and Mrs. Dillon's and Mrs. Linley's balls. Finally, she consented to forego the afternoon's drive, and to see me the next day; and taking my leave, I quitted her.

"Nelly," said Percy, as he wished me good-night, "I think it only just to tell you, that poor Edith's name has for some time past been associated with an unpleasant amount of scandal; and I have to-night heard it commented upon with a degree of freedom which convinces me that she needs a sister's advice."

"I am to see her to-morrow," I answered, in deep sadness. "I shall warn her. Good night; and thank you, dear Percy, for taking so kind an interest in my poor sister."

I turned to leave the room; but Blanche, putting her arms round my neck, said, with tearful eyes and quivering voice—

"Poor Nelly! You are so good, and yet have so much sorrow! When—when will you be happy? Ah! why will you persist in refusing to create for yourself new interests in life—interests which would supersede the old ones!"

And she gazed wistfully in my face.

"I shall never marry!" I answered, in a broken voice; for I was touched by the unselfish kindness of these young, fresh hearts, who, unabsorbed by their own happiness, could yet sympathise with my troubles. "Dear Blanche! I am but a sad companion for so bright and sunny a creature as you! Bear with me," I added, as the tears fell through my clasped

fingers, "bear with me; for indeed I have been sorely tried! Your affection, and dear Percy's, are all that I have left!"

The next day, on entering the drawing-room in Arlington-street, I found Edith, not as I had expected, alone, but with Mr. Elmore, the bold and unprincipled man who had been the subject of the conversation I had overheard the night before.

"There—now you *must* go!" she exclaimed, as I entered the room. "I have promised this afternoon to my sister; but I shall see you to-night."

He rose to take leave; and, while doing so, held her hand far longer than there was any occasion for; and, in relinquishing it—but no matter.

"Edith, you did not ring for the servant to open the door!"

"Oh no!" she laughingly replied; "I never do, for *him*! He is here perpetually—morning, noon, and night! I see far more of him, than I do of Oscar, who is all day at his club, or with some of his friends."

I was thunderstruck, and yet felt comforted; for I saw that she had not a thought of harm, or she could not speak so openly.

"Edith, my darling," I earnestly resumed, seating myself beside her, and taking both her hands in mine, "it is on this very subject that I have come to warn you!"

The colour rose to her face.

"Nay, little sister, I mean not to offend; I only mean to talk to you as I did when you were a baby, in the little cottage. Would to Heaven you had never left it!"

She withdrew her hands; and anger sat upon her brow, as she replied,—

"Nelly—what do you mean? What have I done? Of what do you accuse me?"

Then I told her of all that I had heard—of the fearful calumnies which were already breathed against her name. I told her that the *world*, not knowing her—as I did—to be pure and innocent, would not hesitate to place the *worst* construction on her conduct. Above all, I implored her to dismiss the abandoned, heartless villain, who had lately been her inseparable companion.

"Oh, Edith!" I entreated, "remember all that you owe to yourself, and your husband, and show this man that you are mindful of it! I beseech you, do not admit him in Oscar's absence!"

"In that case," she impatiently interrupted, "I should not admit him at all! for Oscar is *always* absent till dinner-time; and I should be bored to death if I had not some one to amuse me. You are really becoming prudish and old-maidish in your notions; and, from leading so quiet a life yourself, forget what *mine* must be! Besides, Mr. Elmore is my husband's great friend; and he has even asked him to accompany us abroad."

"And will he?" I asked; amazed at such unaccountable infatuation on Oscar's part.

"Yes; and he will be a delightful travelling companion."

"But surely, Edith, you would rather be alone with your husband, in the beautiful scenes through which you will travel! To me, half their charm would be destroyed if my enjoyment were disturbed by the society of a third person. Would you not far rather travel alone with Oscar?"

No, indeed!" she replied, with a little wilful gesture; "it would be *toujours perdrix*, which I detest! And Oscar, too, would be terribly bored; for he is not the paragon of a husband that you fancy! You were always such an admirer of his that you never *could* see his faults!"

I knew, by her heightened colour, that the taunt was intended; but, resolved that nothing should interfere with the object I had in view, I suppressed the bitter answer that rose to my lips.

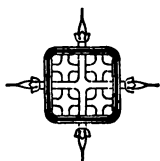
"Oh, Edith darling!" I still pleaded, again possessing myself of her unwilling hands, "pause, I beseech you, ere it be too late! Pause, while your heart is yet pure and innocent! Have pity on yourself, my darling sister; for your beauty and gentleness expose you to fearful perils! Remember Mrs. Annesley—the terrible disgrace that she brought upon herself and others!"

She tore away her hands, and stood before me, blazing with indignation. At first her anger was too great for words; but soon, the torrent of rage which oppressed her broke forth with a vehemence of which I had thought her incapable.

"And you *dare* to compare *me* with that most abandoned woman! Your love for me has indeed ceased, or you *could* not do so! You are becoming old, and soured, and disappointed; and you have never forgiven me for having been able to console Oscar for your rejection! Ah! if you knew *all*, you would feel that you had little cause to pique yourself

on having had it in your power to reject him! He loved me before you were aware of it; and, had you not set him free, the probability is that he would have deserted you!"

More she would have said; but, not daring to trust myself longer in her presence—feeling that I could not brook the insults she was heaping upon me—I left her, with the determination never again to enter her house.





A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.

PROVERBS XXV. 11.

AND now I tried to think no more of my sister; or, at least, to hope for the best. The season was over; and, after passing two months in visits to different friends, she and her husband started for the continent, where they were to be absent till the following spring, as they intended to winter at Florence. Edith never wrote to me; but I heard of her through Lady L——, with whom she kept up a regular correspondence. At the approach of winter Lady L—— started to join them at Florence, but promised to write frequently, and to give me all the news,

And so, time passed on, and we there lived in the little cottage, no event occurring to disturb the current of our lives, save the death of poor Tibbets, who departed this life at the advanced age of nineteen years. I absolutely wept, when I laid Edith's old pet in the narrow bed which Percy had dug for it; for poor Tibbets had lived at Rocklands, and I felt as if he were one of the family. Little Bully had died long before; so we interred poor puss beside him. Bob was getting old, but was still able to work; only, we spared him as much as he liked, and put him on an allowance of corn and hay, in addition to the fresh meadow grass which had hitherto been his sole provender. Percy too, had improved his shed, converting it into a capital stable; so that poor Bob was comfortable in his old age.

I had not heard from Mr. Percival for a long, long while;

but Minnie Ashton told us that she now looked upon his engagement with Florence as certain; for they were, she said, constantly to be seen together. But I tried not to think of it; for I could not bear the idea of losing this last friend also. Lady Ashton had often repeated her kind invitation; and, since Oscar's marriage, the Herberts also had invited me. But in both instances I declined; thanking Lady Ashton from my heart, but coldly and distantly excusing myself to the Herberts.

At last the season had again come round, and I heard that Edith was in town; yet I made no effort to see her. I called, however, on Lady L——, who spoke very reservedly of Edith, evidently shunning the mention of her name. Observing this, I pressed her to be more explicit, at the same time telling her that I had been very uneasy on my sister's account, as I had feared that she was indulging in a levity of conduct which would render both herself and her husband very unhappy. As I spoke thus to Lady L——, I could see the tears slowly gathering in her eyes; and, as I concluded, she clasped my hands, exclaiming, in accents of deep sorrow —

“Alas! alas! — her levity was then *nothing*, compared with what it is now! Nelly, I tremble for her! If *you* have any influence with her, exert it, I beseech you; for *I* have failed! I fear she is heartless and ungrateful!”

And she sighed deeply.

I walked home, pondering her words. *Her* influence had failed, as mine had! What then, *could* save her? I had vainly appealed to her affection; — her vanity seemed to be her bane, and to obscure and overpower the gentle, affectionate nature which once was hers. There was, then, no hope of touching her feelings. What could I do? — A sudden thought struck me. I would appeal to Oscar.

The next evening beheld me quietly pacing to and fro in a narrow street, through which Oscar would pass, on his way home from his club. After waiting for some time, I recognised his cab, and, stopping it, begged him to walk with me a little way. He complied, with the same frigidly polite air with which, since the evening of his dismissal, he had uniformly treated me.

“Oscar,” I pleaded, “I do beseech you to abandon, for once, your most unjust resentment, and to join with me in rescuing your wife, and yourself, from utter misery! — Why,

why do you leave her so much alone? You know how weak she is, and to what fearful temptations her extreme beauty exposes her. Oh! do not leave her the plea, that your neglect was the cause of her levity! Be more with her;—be her guide—her counsellor; be strong for her,—for she is too weak to guide herself!”

He coldly interrupted me —

“And is this all that you came to tell me?” he asked, in cold, repelling tones.

I bowed, assentingly.

He resumed, in a tone of sarcasm which pained me,—for it proved that there was no hope for Edith from *him*.

“I have to thank you for your extreme solicitude with regard to my honour, which however, with your permission, I will still persist in believing to be in no danger! My wife is young, handsome, and admired; and I am content that it should be so. Can I see you to your home, or assist you in any way?” he added, with the same frigid courtesy; for I had stopped.

“I thank you—no;” and, leaving him, I pursued my way home, feeling utterly disappointed with the result of my mission.

“Oh!” I murmured to myself, “have faith in God — *more* faith! *He* can save the erring one — aye, even from the gates of hell! Have faith — have patience! and, in His own good time, and in His own good way, He *will* save her!”

And I prayed, “Lord, *increase* my faith!”

The season was rapidly passing away. I lived more quietly than ever; for I had no heart for much gaiety, and Blanche was too entirely occupied with a little new-comer (Percy, the second!) to think of, or care for, any amusement.

One evening, on my return home, I found Lady L—— awaiting for me in my own room.

“Ah! how glad I am that you have come at last!” she exclaimed, with a sigh of relief; “I must consult with you; and we must devise some plan for saving that unfortunate child!”

I interrupted her — “What — Edith?”

“Yes, Edith. She is completely infatuated by that bad, unprincipled man! Oscar is quite blinded by him! and no wonder;—for, in *his* presence, the accomplished roué hardly approaches Edith, but generally selects, as the object of his

attention, some very pretty girl, whom, as he is, unhappily, an extremely handsome and fascinating man, he always succeeds in duping as completely as he does the unfortunate husband. I am afraid — I should be *ashamed* — to hint my fears; but I *do* dread his influence just now, as Oscar is going to M——, to see his father, who is ill, and he may be absent for a fortnight. He *says* he shall return in a week, as he means only to go there and back, without stopping for more than two days; but I doubt it. Yet, even in that case, reflect, how much harm such a man as Elmore can effect in one short week, with a woman of Edith's yielding nature!"

"But," I interrupted, "why does not Edith accompany her husband?"

"She will not. She says that she does not like the Herberts; and that she should not think of leaving town just towards the close of the season. I begged her to come to me; but she would not. In short, I see, only too plainly, that she is entirely under that man's influence. Nelly, *I* have failed; but then, *I* always spoiled her. Try what *you* can do. She has a warm and affectionate heart, if it could but be touched; but that seems, at present, impossible!"

"I will go to her," I murmured, dreamily; for a thought had struck me, and I believed that I — and I alone — could touch that seemingly callous heart.

Next day, sending an excuse to my pupils, I called on my sister before her hour for receiving visitors, when I knew that I should find her alone. It was more than a year since I had seen her, and I had great misgivings as to the reception I should meet with; for I still remembered the flashing eye, the scornful lip, and the insulting words, when we had parted. I need not have feared. As I quietly and unannounced entered the room, and marked the dejected attitude with which she was bending over something that she held in her hand, I paused in astonishment. Was this the gay and brilliant coquette — the admiration of the men — the envy of the women — whose merry laugh, like a clear bell, rang nightly through the brilliant *salons*, which seemed dull and lifeless without her radiant presence? As I watched her, sigh after sigh burst from her — sighs that seemed to rend her heart. At last, the big tears, which she had vainly tried to brush away, fell slowly upon the little hands that were clasping the object of her attention; and as her head drooped lower and

lower, she broke into a passion of sobs, such as I thought *she* could never utter.

I forgot all. She was again the little darling of Rocklands — the treasure of my life!

“Edith!”

Only that word; yet it seemed to ring with startling force upon her ear. She looked up incredulously. Then, opening her arms, she fell upon my neck.

“Oh! Nelly, Nelly! why did you leave me? I thought never to see you again! Dear sister Nelly! dearer to me than all the rest! Don't leave me again! Let me be your darling once more! Oh! would that I had never left you!”

And, amidst passionate tears and sobs, she clung to me for protection.

“My darling! my pet! dearer to me in your sorrow — ah, far dearer! — than you ever were in your light-hearted gaiety! I have never ceased to think of you and to pray for you! They are all gone — all those dear ones — and you alone are left for me to love and cherish!”

She looked in my face, and spoke earnestly, and as if moved by some strong agony of conflicting emotions.

“Nelly, be with me; help me; save me — for I am very weak. Oh! *promise* that you will never desert me — promise!”

“I do,” I answered solemnly; “I promise it to you, as I did to your poor, dead mother!”

“My mother! oh, my mother! If *she* could see me!”

And there was another violent fit of weeping.

“Edith, my poor child, have you long been unhappy?” I asked, tenderly drawing her head to my shoulder, as when, in the old time, I used to console her — a little petted child — in all her griefs.

“Oh! yes, Nelly — whenever I was alone. So I have sought excitement for the sake of distraction. How I have longed for you, Nelly — dear Nelly! How I have hated myself for speaking to you as I did the last time we met! How I have hoped that you would forgive me my ingratitude (for you are so good!), and that you would once more call me ‘your darling’! See! I was thinking of you when you entered!”

And, stooping, she picked up the little miniature that she

had been weeping over. It was a portrait of myself, which I had given her when she first went to Paris.

"Edith, is Oscar yet gone?"

"No; he goes to-night."

"Then, darling, come and spend the time of his absence with me; my holidays are just beginning, so that I can be with you all day. What a happiness for me! Ah, do not refuse, or I shall think you do not love your sister Nelly!"

She hesitated. Her eyes sought the ground; and the deep blush which suffused her face convinced me that I could not be too much in earnest in insisting on her compliance with my request.

"Then you will come, dear? I will ring for Marie to put up the few things you will want, and you can return with me." And I approached the bell.

But she arrested my hand. "No, Nelly; I cannot go with you!"

"And why?" I asked, briefly and decidedly.

"Because I have engagements in town. I—I—have promised to remain here."

"I thought so!" I answered, sternly. "You have promised — and I will tell you *to whom*."

She started.

"To that bad, unprincipled man — your husband's enemy, and your own; who, if you listen to him, will prove your ruin, as he has already proved the ruin of many!"

"Nelly, Nelly, beware! I *will* not be spoken to in this way! I will not hear you speak so of *him*! He is my husband's friend, and mine; and if he admires me a little more than he ought to do, it is only what many people have done over and over again, and no harm has come of it."

"Edith, how can you speak thus of that most wicked man, whose heartless principles are but too well known?"

Again her eyes blazed, and she stood before me as on the former occasion.

"Since you *will* have it so," she exclaimed, passionately, "let us part; and I will never see you more! I thought I had met a gentle, loving sister; not a tyrant — a spy over my actions! What do I owe you? What have *you* ever done for me, that you should presume thus to dictate?"

"Well, Edith," I answered, calmly, "I will *tell* you what I have done for you — all the sacrifices that my love for you

has entailed on me — all that you have made me suffer — and the life of hardship to which, for your sake, I resigned myself — which, but for me, but for my fatal, fatal indulgence, would have been yours! I wished to spare you the knowledge of what I am about to unfold; but since nothing less will save you from the awful gulf which yawns at your feet, I must even inflict the necessary pain. When I have told you all, dismiss me, if you like; but, ah! I know your heart, my little sister, and you will *not* do so!"

And then, making her re-seat herself beside me, I told her all, without any reservation. First, my refusal, on her account, to join Oscar in India; next, Lady L——'s offer of adopting me, and the efforts I had made to induce her to transfer the advantage to my sister. Finally (but here my voice failed me, and I avoided looking at Edith) I told her of the misdirected letter, and of my discovery of her treachery — of the scene between myself and Oscar, and of the utter ruin of all the cherished hopes of years. Towards the end of my recital, I felt her shrink from me; and I knew by the averted face, half-buried in her hands, that she was overwhelmed with remorse and shame. I ceased, and for a few moments there was silence. I then resumed:—

"And now, Edith, my own, my dearest — all the dearer for the sufferings I have endured on your account — tell me, am I to leave you? Must we part, never to meet again?"

Still hiding her face, she sobbed forth, that if I *could* love her after all that I had told her, I might now and ever do with her as I would, and that she would give up everything in the world for me.

At that moment, I felt that all my trials were well repaid, since they had been the means of saving her who was more precious to me than life; and, kneeling before my darling, I drew her arms round my neck, and laid her dear, sad face on my bosom.

That night, as she lay in her little bed, she looked so like the Edith of old days, that I turned back again and again to kiss her, and to say one more "Good-night." At last, I was really going; but she called to me:—

"Come back, Nelly! One more kiss! Oh! how good you have been to me! I can never — never forget it! Are you *quite* sure you love me as well?"

"Naughty child — to doubt it!"

"Nelly, how happy I might have been, if I had always lived with you in this dear little cottage! I feel so much happier here, in this tiny room, than in that great house in Arlington Street. I *wish* I had never left you!" she added, with a heavy sigh.

"Yet, darling, temptation might have found you here, just as much as in those gay and brilliant circles which you were so well-fitted to adorn. Above all, the sin of *discontent* might have been yours. It is a mistake to suppose that a life of seclusion will ward off temptation; for if it save us from one sin, it may all the more surely lead us into another. No, Edith; I would have you feel that there is but *one* defence against the assaults of the tempter; and that is, true religion. You know how beautifully it has been defined:—'*True religion is this: to visit the fatherless and the widow in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*' Do you remember the story I so often read to you when you were a child—the story of Innocence and the Scarlet Cloak?"

"Ah! yes, Nelly; I remember it very well; and I now understand it as I never did before!"

"Edith, dearest—I wish you would always bear that story in mind. Remember that the pure white garments of little Innocence became sadly 'spotted by the world'; and that *vanity* was *her* bane. God grant that it be not yours! And now good night, my own dearest."

Before I slept, I stole quietly in, to have one more look at my darling. Her sweet, innocent face, rested on her hand; and her calm, regular breathing, told me that she slept. As I gazed upon her I was pained by the look of sadness which had stolen over that fair, young brow; and, stooping gently, I kissed the white hand that rested on the coverlet. As I did so I started in affright; for she breathed a name that seemed to freeze my blood—*his* name!—the destroyer's!

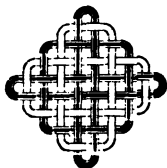
"So then," I muttered, "I was but just in time to save her!"

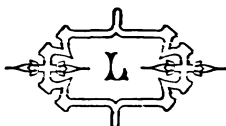
In another moment the anxious look had vanished, and was replaced by a smile of inexpressible sweetness, as she murmured—

"Nelly—dear sister!—again!—"

And she moved restlessly, as though her sleep were disturbed by some dream.

I left her, and prayed long and earnestly, that my efforts for her salvation might be aided and directed by that Being who is "able to save *to the uttermost*"; and I felt comforted, and lay down to rest in the sweet hope that happier days were in store for my darling, and for myself.





I could not love a man without first esteeming him; and I could not esteem the man who, in pursuance of his own selfish purposes, led me into the guilt of ingratitude, falsehood, and dissimulation.—COTTAGERS OF GLENBURNIE.

THAT fortnight was a happy one; for, though my sister had lost her old cheerfulness, and entered into all our simple pursuits with listless melancholy, I hoped that her sorrow was "that godly sorrow which worketh repentance"; and when she left us, to rejoin her husband, though I sighed after the pleasant walks and talks that I had had with my treasure, and sadly missed the sweet face, and the dear, gentle voice, I felt comforted when I dwelt upon her parting assurance, that henceforth she would struggle against her besetting sin, and would strive to do what was right by her husband and herself. And so I re-entered upon my labours with a light and happy heart. I could not see much of my sister; but I heard of her through Lady L——, who expressed herself satisfied with Edith's changed conduct. And thus I felt secure, till one day, a fortnight before Edith's departure from town, Lady L—— called, and, with evident perturbation, informed me, that this year also, Oscar, with inconceivable infatuation, had invited Mr. Elmore to travel with them.

"And," she added, "I know that man well; and I am certain, that when once Edith is away from you, his influence over her will be terrible; *she* is so weak and yielding; while *he* has immense force of character, and a will, and a continuity of purpose, that nothing can bend. Oh, Nelly! try, once more, *your* influence against *his*! You may fail; but you will, at all events, have done your duty by that unhappy child!"

called on Edith the following day, and found her alone

with Mr. Elmore, though it was before her hour for receiving visitors. Her confusion, on seeing me, was extreme; but, affecting not to remark it, I begged that she would allow me a little private conversation. At the same time I looked steadily at the unprincipled villain, with a gaze which must at once have revealed my knowledge of his purpose, and my scorn and hatred for himself; for he returned it by one of deep and determined malignity that made me tremble. However, he rose to depart; and, when he was gone, I expressed to Edith my sorrow and astonishment at having found him there, and my surprise at hearing that he was again to be their travelling companion.

She answered gently, yet with evidently suppressed impatience, that she thought it unreasonable of me to be alarmed at such trifles; that if her *husband* were satisfied, she could not be doing wrong; and that *he* had asked Mr. Elmore to accompany them on their tour, and how could she help that? Then, seeing the heavy cloud of sorrow and disappointment that darkened my brow, she gently threw her arms around me, saying,—

“Dearest Nelly, you need not fear for me; for, though Mr. Elmore *is* to travel with us, I intend never to be alone with him; he will be my *husband's* companion, not mine. Alas! the little affection that I ever felt for Oscar has been entirely alienated by his neglect! If *he* had loved me, my life might have been a very different one. He never *loved* me,—he only *admired*; and, as long as his selfish pride is flattered by the admiration paid to me, he is content. When he is alone with me, he seems listless and discontented; I am no *companion* for him: and, therefore, it is no wonder that he invites Mr. Elmore to go with us. But do not fear, Nelly, dearest; for I will indeed, for your sake, be careful.”

She spoke with such hopeless depth of sorrow, that I was inexpressibly moved; yet I felt that I must not allow my feelings to interfere with my duty towards her. So I argued—

“But, dearest, how is it that I found you alone with Mr. Elmore, before your usual time of receiving visitors?”

“Because,” she answered,—and as the full, earnest eyes met mine, I knew that she spoke the truth,—“because he *will not* be denied. He only laughs when the servant says ‘not at home,’ or ‘engaged,’ and pushes past him into this room, where he always finds me.”

"Yet, Edith, you are evidently dressed to receive some one! This morning, at all events, you expected, and had made up your mind, to see him!"

She blushed; and her eyes sought the ground.

"Why, Nelly, as I knew that he *would* come in, I was obliged to be suitably dressed to receive him!"

"Yes, dear; but the simple *toilette de matin* which you always wear is far more suitable, and quite good enough for any visitor who may come before the usual hour of reception. But, Edith, you know that the dress you wear to-day is more becoming in make and colour, (she blushed still more painfully), and therefore, have you worn it! Oh, my sister, if you already *court* the admiration you so lately professed to shun, I have, indeed, cause for anxiety on your account!"

I stopped; for her tears were falling, and I had not the heart to continue.

"Oh! my darling!" I exclaimed, tenderly kissing her sad, tearful face, "I have no courage to scold you! But do, I beseech you, be more prudent! Remember that we are told to 'avoid even the *appearance* of evil,'—not merely the evil *itself*, but even its very *shadow*! And try, *try*, to win back your husband's love—if, indeed, as you say, it has become alienated."

"No, Nelly," she replied, in such mournful, hopeless accents! "No; for I no longer love him! Alas! I never *esteemed* him, and therefore, could not truly *love* him! But, for *your* sake, I will try to do as you would have me. I *will* be firm!"

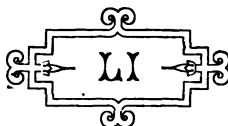
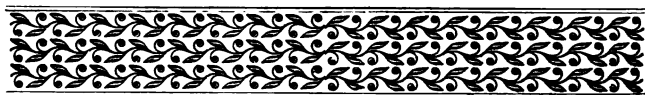
In leaving her, I mentally determined to call every day at the same time—to sacrifice everything to this one great duty; so that my presence might be a substitute for that of the unprincipled man whose influence I was trying to nullify; and that my counsels might strengthen my sister in her good, but alas! weak and variable resolutions. But even I knew not *his* determination—*his* audacity! I called that day, and every succeeding one, before my sister's departure, and was always told that she was out. I felt much comforted by the assurance, since it proved to me that my sister was thus resolutely avoiding her tempter. Ah! could I for one moment have suspected the truth!—that he, determined to have no interruptions to his *tête-à-têtes* with my sister; and fearing that my influence might prevail—that he had *dared* to order

the servants not to admit me, and that they already obeyed him as their master !

The evening before her departure, my sister called to say farewell. Deep sadness was on her brow, and she clung round my neck, and lingered a long while in my room; then, after promising to be all I could wish, she left — alas ! for her and for me ! I had expressed my sorrow that I had never been able to find her at home; but, as I did not mention the *time* at which I had called, she naturally concluded that my visits were late in the afternoon, or in the evening, when she really *was* out. Thus the deceit, which if known, would have opened her eyes as well as mine, remained undiscovered; and I believed that she was really determined to avoid the tempter, when, in fact, she was already encircled in his wiles.

And thus, in a treacherous security, I suffered her to depart, and, my mind relieved of this one great anxiety, I regained all my old cheerfulness; — nay, not *all* — but I tried not to think of the *one* subject of pain — not to indulge the *one* harrowing regret for what I thought irrevocable. And, amidst all our hopes, fears, and delusions, stern, callous, unpitying Time strode on, little caring whether the fruits which he scattered from his large open hand were bitter or sweet; nor whether the heavy, remorseless sweep of his great, sharp scythe mowed down the weeds, or the flowers, that lay in his path — that stern and terrible destroyer !





The roar of the tempest came down from the land,
And white grew the face of the sea,
And a cloud in the distance, as small as a band,
Seemed leading the storm on our lee;
One moment the moon like a beacon-light shone
In the heaven's magnificent arc;
In the next, like a phantom, 'twas vanish'd and gone,
And the sky and the ocean grew dark.

SWAIN.

THAT Autumn was a very pleasant one; for Percy and Blanche planned all sorts of little excursions for Saturday afternoon, which I now managed should always be a holiday. Sometimes it was a nutting-party — sometimes, an excursion to an orchard; then, again, we would take the little Constance to see some of the London sights. In such innocent pleasures as these, our days flew rapidly; and cheerful voices and ringing laughter were heard in the little dwelling. Towards the close of Autumn we were agreeably surprised by a visit from Mr. Percival, whose engagement to Florence no longer remained doubtful, as Minnie Crosier had taxed her with it, and she had not denied it. Mr. Percival was at H — for a fortnight, and spent every evening with us. The one before his departure, I found myself, for the first time, alone with him, Percy and Blanche being at a concert. We talked of Rocklands, and of all the old times, and the old people; afterwards, we spoke of the events of more recent years, and at last he said —

“Nelly — when last I parted from you, you were struggling against some crushing trial. Tell me — did you surmount it?”

“I did,” I replied, briefly and coldly.

“Will you *now* tell me what it was?”

"Excuse me — I cannot."

"Forgive me," he continued, in pained accents, "I did not mean to offend you; but you then said you might one day tell me what your great trial had been, and I should have been wanting in friendship, and in the regard which I owe to the memory of those who are no more, if I had taken no further notice of your words. Should I not?"

I replied, coldly, that I did not doubt his friendship. Then there was a long silence, broken at last by Mr. Percival. Looking up suddenly, with a flushed face, he exclaimed —

"Nelly — I must and will speak! What is the reason of your altered demeanour? Have I unconsciously offended you in any way? Else, why have you ceased to write to me? and why do you treat me with this persevering coldness of manner?"

His voice trembled; and he stopped abruptly. I *could* have answered; and yet, what would that answer have been? for hardly, even to myself, could I define my own sensations. I was silent.

"Nay, then," and this time he spoke in an offended tone — "Nay, if you will not answer, I can arrive at but *one* conclusion! Deeply painful as it is to me to revert to the past, I must do so, in order to remove so erroneous an impression from your mind. You think that the friendship I profess for you is but the cloak for another and a deeper feeling; and you dread a renewal of the confession I once made to you. Believe me, such is furthest from my thoughts; you need not fear that I shall ever again breathe a single word of *love* to you! I gave you my promise — my *word* — that I would not again annoy you; and if you could read my heart, you would see that that promise is in no danger of being forfeited!"

I thought of his engagement with Florence, and therefore remained silent, willing that he should interpret my coldness (which I felt to be most unjust) in any way but the right one.

"Nelly," he mournfully continued, "you are sadly changed! I have lost your confidence — your friendship! — I regret it deeply!"

I was moved, even to tears. Looking up, I caught his hand, and exclaimed —

"You misjudge me. I have the highest esteem and regard for you, and can never forget that you were my poor mother's

best friend ! But I try to cultivate as little as possible the memory of the past, and —" I added, struggling for self-control, "and the old feelings connected with it; for they unfit me for my present mode of life. And thus even my friendship for you may one day cease !"

"I am sorry to hear it !" he replied, in a tone of deep vexation.

Soon after, he left; and I felt dissatisfied with myself, yet resolved to think no more about him — or, rather, to regard him as the husband of Florence.

Time wore on. Cold, wretched winter folded us in his icy garments, numbing all our faculties — seeming to freeze our very brain. But he passed away; and spring, with her genial influence shewed her bright face, soon dispelling the bitter frost and the bleak wind. And now I heard that Edith would soon return, and I felt inexpressibly glad; for she had not written to me for some time, and I felt anxious. A week had flown by — and another. In a few days she would be at home. Then I was told that she had arrived.

I called on her, but she was from home. I went again and again, but always received the same answer. I wrote, but received no reply. Could my letters have been intercepted? Could *Oscar* have forbidden her to write to me or see me? At last, I called one day earlier than usual. As I passed the window, my sister was standing at it — a rare thing with her. I marked the quick glance of recognition — the sudden springing back! I rang the bell; and, on receiving the usual answer, "Not at home," replied, that I had seen my sister at the window, and desired the man to tell her that I wished to speak with her. He did so, and returned with the answer, that his mistress could not see *anyone* that morning.

This, to *me* — and from my darling Edith! I made no further attempt to enter, but, determined to discover the reason of her strange and unkind conduct, walked to a little distance, and thence watched the house. After waiting more than an hour, the door opened, and — yes, my trembling heart did not deceive me — Elmore came out! Desiring to know still more, I waited on; and, in less than a quarter of an hour, Oscar returned home. For many days did I continue to watch; and always did the betrayer depart a short time before the return of the infatuated husband, who was evidently thus kept in ignorance of his visits, and believed that his wife

and his perfidious friend met in society only. Convinced that any attempt to see my sister would be useless, I resolved to try the effect of one more appeal to Oscar. I did so, and with no better success than before. At my very first words he stopped me, by saying that he allowed no one to interfere between himself and his wife; then, raising his hat, he politely wished me good morning. I wrote to my sister, telling her of all that I had seen, and appealing strongly to her affection for me; the letter was returned to me, directed in a hand that was neither my sister's nor Oscar's. I felt that I could do no more! And thus the season passed away.

It was on a beautiful evening in the end of June that I bent my steps homewards, weary of the noise and dust of the great city, and thinking with pleasure of the sweet little garden, with its bright flowers, cool grass, and shady trees, where, with the little ones, we generally walked in the evening. As I approached the cottage, I was surprised to see a travelling-carriage, with four horses, standing at the door. My heart bounded, for I thought that it was my sister come to see me before her departure; and yet I had understood that she was to remain longer in town. Hastening forward, and seeing Oscar run from the house, I advanced joyously to meet him; but, as I did so, I was alarmed by the fearful wildness of his looks. Eagerly I exclaimed,—

“Edith!—is she well?”

“Oh! Nelly, you have come at last! Thank God! thank God!” were his first words, as he dragged rather than led me into the house. I thought she was ill, and, in an agony of terror, besought him to allay my fears.

“Ill! ill! would to God she were! Would to God she were dead! Anything—anything—rather than this shame and infamy!”

“Speak!” I cried, seizing him firmly, and gasping for breath. “What has happened? Speak—if you would not rive me mad!”

And then, in low, shuddering tones, he spoke words that froze my blood, and seemed to make my heart stand still.

But, starting up, he exclaimed passionately,—

“Yet we may still save her!—not to be my *wife*—but we may rescue my name from infamy, and snatch away *his* prize!”

And he clenched his hands, and, with set teeth, cursed his own blindness and infatuation.

"We may overtake them. I have traced them to the Dover Road. If I meet *him* —"

The deadly, malignant expression of his face was horrible to look on — there was *murder* in it!

"Come! come! They have the start of us by a few hours, yet we may overtake them. All is ready — come!"

In another moment we were in the chariot, dashing madly on towards London. On! on! on! for more than life! — for that, without which, life were but one slow, lingering torture! For some time, our agitation prevented our speaking; but at length I was able to question him, and then learnt that the worst had indeed happened. She — my little sister — my darling — my rose-bud — the plaything of my childish days — the hope and pride of my maturer years — my little, tender, helpless sister — had fled!

Elmore had that morning despatched his servant with a note, to be given *immediately* to Mrs. Oscar Herbert; but the man, being unable to read, and mistaking his master's instructions, had inquired in Arlington Street for Mr. Herbert, and, on being told that he was out, had followed him to his club, where, not finding him, he had left the note to be given him directly he should arrive. Returning home, he met his master near Arlington Street, and, being asked if he had delivered the note to Mrs. Herbert, the fatal mistake became known to him. The consternation of Elmore may be imagined. He rushed in a frantic state into Edith's presence, representing what would be the frightful wrath of Oscar; and thus, what had before been mere levity — inexcusable, it is true, but still *only* levity — assumed a more serious form. Dreading the frightful and ungovernable rage of Oscar, she yielded to the persuasions of her tempter, to whom she now clung for protection, and fled; and when Oscar, some hours later, returned to his club, read the fatal letter, and, with a hell of wrath burning in his heart, dashed furiously home, he found that home desolate, and knew, by the confusion which prevailed in his wife's apartments, that he was too late!

And now we were driving rapidly through the streets of London; now we had cleared them; and soon we were in the country, and the fresh, pure air, blew upon our heated brows.

Then night came on — calm, melancholy night — with its deep blue sky, spangled with its myriad stars. Oscar was in a state of uncontrollable fury and impatience, often shouting from the window, and promising to double, treble the fees, if he caught the fugitives at the next post-house; cursing their tardiness, though we seemed to fly through the air, so rapid was our motion. At last an accident happened to one of the wheels; and we had to get another carriage, which delayed us half an hour, during which time he was in a state of frenzy, verging on madness, and stamped in and out of the little room in which I sat, as if unmindful of my presence. At last we again started on our journey; and, for some time, neither of us spoke. Oscar still continued alternately to swear at the postillions and to offer them enormous bribes. And thus we passed the night; a night of agony to me — of rage and wounded pride to him.

The sky had become overcast; thick, massive clouds, were piled upon each other, and the wind had gradually risen, and now began to howl, with a heavy, booming sound, as if some mighty spirit were lamenting over the ruin of one so young and fair as her of whom we were in pursuit. At length, worn out with fatigue and anxiety, I fell into an uneasy slumber, from which I was aroused by the stopping of the carriage. Looking out of the window to see where we were, I felt nearly blinded by a most awful flash of lightning; while, at the same moment, the thunder crashed above — around — everywhere — as if the universe were dissolving; and the wind screamed, like the wild, discordant laughter, of mocking fiends! The people came out of the small inn at which we had stopped, and begged us to enter, saying that it would not be safe to proceed in such a storm; but Oscar swore a frightful oath that nothing should prevent him. The postillions approached the carriage.

"Sir," said one of them, "it's madness to go on! the horses'll never stand the lightning! There hasn't been such a storm this fifty years! We can't make head against such a wind!"

But Oscar was inflexible.

"Go on," he cried; "four times your fee for the next stage! What! stop when we are only two stages from Dover?"

And, with his own hands, he assisted to harness the horses. The grey light of morning now began to shed its pale rays on our anxious, despairing faces; but the storm, far from abating,

only increased in wildness; and, rage and swear as he might, the staggering horses made but poor head against the furious wind which, with strong and mighty will, opposed itself to their progress. As we approached the coast, we heard the maddened roar of the sea as it beat upon the cliffs; and my heart bled, as I thought that my poor, gentle, timid darling might be listening to it in terror, but with a far *greater* terror at her heart—the dread of her husband's wrath!

"O Oscar!—Oscar! for the love of Heaven be gentle with her! poor, helpless lamb, in the sharp fangs of that fierce wolf!"

"*Her*—the traitress!" he answered fiercely;—What have I to do with *her*? I might have known, that if she could be false to *you*, she would to me! But I seek not *her*; she is henceforth dead to me! I seek *him*! I thirst for his blood! and here he broke forth into a frightful volley of imprecations.

The chaise stopped; we were at Dover. At every stage we had received intelligence which convinced us that we were on the right track; and my heart sank with dread unutterable, as I anticipated the frightful scene which must shortly take place—the meeting of two unchained madmen—the infuriated husband and the baffled seducer.

"They cannot escape!" he muttered. "Though they were six hours a-head of us, they have been kept here by the storm; no boat would put to sea in such weather!"

And he laughed in fiendish exultation. His passion was frightful to witness.

And now began our search for the inn at which the fugitives had stopped. At last we found it. It was a small, low house, close to the sea-shore. Oscar had now fallen into a calm, even more terrible than his previous wrath; it was the stealthy crouch of the tiger, who feels secure of his prey, and has but to spring upon it and rend it to atoms. In his still and death-like voice he asked—

"Have a gentleman and lady arrived here? We have come to join them."

"They came here, sir, a good seven hours ago; but they left almost directly."

He was speechless with rage.

"Left?" I asked; "for what place?"

"For Calais. It was blowing hard, and the sailors expected

a storm,—not one of them would put to sea; but the gentleman said that his father was dying, at Calais, and had sent for him and his sister; and at last, by offering a large bribe, persuaded one of them to put off with him. After that, it blew harder and harder; and now, it's such a storm as hasn't been known here this fifty years!"

Oscar had now recovered, and frantically entreated some of the sailors to put to sea with him; but no bribe that he could offer availed to induce them. They said that it would be certain destruction, and that the sloop "Julia," in which the gentleman and lady had sailed, could not possibly live out the gale, as she was old, and unseaworthy. Oscar raved and cursed like a madman; and his fury continued all that day and night, during which time the storm remained unabated. At last he was obliged to admit that he had been foiled; and, with indescribable rage and mortification, prepared to return home. Home!—there was none for *him*! Should he go back to the deserted house, to be reminded, at every turn, of his horrible desolation?—to meet the hateful sympathy of friends—the ill-disguised exultation of enemies? Alas! alas! there was no home for *him*!

For some time we remained in deep silence, broken only, now and then, by a deep sigh from Oscar,—a sigh which seemed to rend his heart. At last his head fell upon his clasped hands; and heavy sobs and groans burst from his labouring breast.

"O my God! my God!"

At the sight of such misery, the resentment of years vanished; and the memory of childish days came over me, as, taking his hands in mine, I murmured—

"My brother! my poor, poor brother! I suffer as much as you do; for she was all I had to love and care for in this world!"

"Oh! Nelly, bear with me!" said the strong man—his pride utterly broken down by the weight of his misfortune; "bear with me; for I am very wretched!—I am disgraced!—*disgraced*!" and he shuddered convulsively.

"My poor Oscar!—This is a sharp trial, now; but *this* life is short—very short—and there is a better one hereafter!"

And I laid my hand pleadingly on his shoulder.

"Oh! Nelly—Nelly! You know not *all* her perfidy!"

She was false to *you*;—to you, the best and noblest of creatures!—and the memory of that treason has stood like a barrier between my love and her! You know not all!"

"Yes, Oscar, I know all! I knew it then, and——"; but here, the memory of all that I had suffered—of all the painful sacrifices of years—come upon me in mighty, overwhelming force; and sobs choked my utterance.

"Then, Nelly, you knew also *what* a return I made for your noble, untiring devotion?"

"I did!" I answered, with bowed head, and hands tremblingly clasped before my face;—"I did!—and I then felt that I had loved unworthily!"

And I told him of the letter which he had written to Edith, and misdirected to me. For a long while he was silent; then, in a broken voice, he said—

"I have *deserved* this heavy blow! It is the retribution of Heaven!"

In deep silence we passed the remainder of our journey. As we approached the great city, I gently took his hands—

"Oscar, my poor brother—I have forgiven all—all! I am still your friend of long ago; for such misery as yours would cancel the memory of far deeper wrongs than mine.—Now, tell me—you cannot return to *that* house?"

"Oh! no—no!" he shudderingly answered.

"Come home to us!—You *must*—indeed you must, Oscar!"

"God bless you, Nelly!" burst from his poor, breaking heart.

And that bruised spirit found peace and consolation in the humble dwelling which had for years witnessed so much of sorrow and joy; and gradually, the poor chastened sinner learnt to seek comfort from the only True Source,—and, while lamenting his own unworthiness, to find, in the paths of humility and penitence, the one unfailing road to happiness.

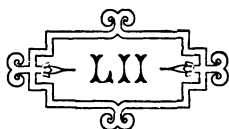
A week after our return, Oscar was reading an account of the awful wrecks with which the coasts were strewn; at last he came to the following paragraph:—

"The sloop 'Julia,' which left Dover for Calais on the night of the 27th inst., was wrecked, and all hands perished. A lady and gentleman (names unknown) who had arrived from London the same night, were on board."

I fell senseless to the ground; and when I recovered, Oscar, looking inexpressibly sad and calm, was tenderly supporting me.

Then the sable garments were donned; and my heart was shrouded in the gloom of night.





Oh! the lost — they leave life drear;
Evermore — evermore:
Nothing can restore
That which made existence dear;
Pass'd — like music on the ear —
Evermore!

Darkness hath the soul o'erspread,
Ever dark — ever dark;
Lost Hope's latest spark:
For the beautiful hath fled —
And a shadow wraps the dead —
Ever dark!

Day returns, but not to save:
Hope is gone — ever gone;
Life is all alone:
I read her name upon her grave —
I hear the moaning of the wave —
Ever gone! SWAIN.

TRULY, "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb"; for now, when my strength was crushed, and my heart well-nigh broken, I was relieved of what would have been an insupportable burden — my daily toil for subsistence. About a fortnight after the events related in the last chapter, my uncle George returned; and, when he found how I was circumstanced, declared that he would not again leave me.

"My income is not large, dear," he added; but I would rather work at the oar than my darling sister's only child — poor Mary's niece — should want anything that I could give her: and, as I shall leave you the few hundreds a year that I possess, you need not save anything."

So it was decided that Uncle George and I should remain at the cottage, and that Blanche and Percy should take one close by; for they now had three children, and found their present accommodation insufficient. Oscar was, of course, to reside with us as long as he liked. And so, when all was arranged, we settled down again to our quiet, unvaried life; and, though I felt that I could never again be *happy*, I trusted that time would bring resignation.

Her name, we never breathed; yet the memory of her sweet face was graven in my thoughts; and the terrible dread that she had died in unrepented sin, wrung my heart with bitter anguish. Yet, might not that fearful, raging storm, which had seemed like the messenger of an Avenging God, sent to check her in her career of wickedness, — might it not have recalled to her memory the judgments of the Almighty, and have appeared an emblem of the wrath which would fall upon her if she clung to her sin? Might she not, even at that last moment, have repented, and, with bitter tears, bewailed her error, and sought pardon from the one True Source? For she knew that “the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from *all* sin”; — and He who reads the heart, and pities the creatures he has formed out of the dust, — He alone could tell whether her repentance was sincere. But I tried not to think of that; — I tried to fancy that I had never had a sister, — or, that she had died when she was a little innocent child.

And Oscar — poor Oscar! No longer selfish and exacting, his own great sorrow, and the confession I had made to him on that fearful, fearful night, had rendered him gentle and loving to all around him. His care and anxiety on my account were most touching, often bringing the tears to my eyes, and making me forget my own grief, at sight of his fallen pride, and almost broken heart. One day, he startled me by saying —

“Dear Nelly — have you no *other* grief, besides the one common to both of us? I sometimes think you have!”

And he gazed anxiously in my face.

I was silent; but the mantling blood suddenly rose to my cheek and brow.

“Then I am right! — — Nelly, why have you, ever since — since —” he hesitated, and then, manfully spoke on — “Why have you, since I, so fortunately for you — but ah!

how miserably for myself!—proved my unworthiness;—why have you never married?”

“Spare me! spare me!” I faltered, with clasped hands, and averted head.

“Then it *is* so!” he rapidly exclaimed: “You have a secret, and, you fancy, hopeless attachment!—but no—it *cannot* be hopeless!” he added, with trembling voice, and inexpressibly mournful emphasis;—“it *cannot* be hopeless! *You* could never love without return! Oh! Nelly, give me your confidence! Let me help you!”

Overcome by conflicting emotions, I rose, and abruptly left the room.

Alas! it was too true!—my existence was embittered by unavailing regrets for the past—for my blind infatuation in rejecting the peaceful, happy lot which *might* have been mine—the one great chance of happiness which, amidst all my clouded hopes, had fallen in my way! Truly, in grasping at the shadow I had lost the substance! and it was now too late—too late! His last words—how they had grated upon my ear—were seared in my memory.—“*You need not fear that I shall ever again breathe a word of love to you!*” Alas! I knew that he would keep his word!—but I also knew that I loved him now, and for ever, and that *this* love would endure, since it was founded on *esteem*! About this time, I received a most kind letter from him. It was written in a gentle, loving tone, such as a father would use towards a dear, afflicted child,—and expressed the deepest sympathy—the most tender anxiety—on my account.—Yet it pained me.

Oscar made no further allusion to our last conversation, but was, if possible, yet more unremitting in his care and tenderness, he and Uncle George vying with each other in their efforts to soothe and comfort me. And truly, at that time I needed all their love; for my heart was sorely bruised, and my spirit fainting within me.

“Oh! my kind friends,” I said, “bear with me yet a little. I know that it is the Hand of God, and I will submit. It may have pleased Him to take the loved one to Himself, to snatch her from a career of sin!—She *may* have repented,—I humbly trust that she did;—but oh! would that she had breathed her last in these arms, and that I could be sure that her latest thoughts were of repentance—her latest words, a prayer for mercy!”

Then Oscar spoke.—“Have faith in God!”

And, as the solemn, mournful tones of his deep voice fell on my ear, I looked up hopefully, and exclaimed—

“I will! I will!—Bless you, my dearest brother, for those words;—for they tell me that I have not suffered *quite* in vain, if I have been, in part, the humble instrument in the hands of the All-Powerful, to lead you to a knowledge of His ways!”

Then, as I took my brother's hands in mine, and gazed upon his poor, grief-worn face, I was comforted; for I felt that his was that “Godly sorrow which worketh repentance.” And peace fell upon my heart; for in all this I recognised the hand of God.





LIII

Oh! 'twas the world to me,
Life too, and more;—
Catching a glance of thee
Passing thy door.
Faint as an autumn leaf
Trembling to part;
So, in that moment brief,
Trembled my heart!

Nothing I saw but thee,
Nothing could find;—
Vision had fled from me,
Lingering behind!
How I had pass'd along,
How found my way,
Sightless amidst the throng—
Love could but say!

How I had moved my feet
I never knew;
I had seen nothing sweet,
Since I'd seen you!
Oh! 'twas the world to me,
Life too—and more—
Catching a glance of thee,
Passing thy door. SWAIN.

Two more years had passed; and the three mourners still lived in the little cottage.—It was a beautiful summer evening, and we were enjoying the sweet, balmy air of the garden. I, with my book in my lap, was seated on a rustic bench, directing the labours of Oscar, who, with his coat off, was busied in raking, hoeing, weeding, and tying up stray flowers. Uncle

George was in the little orchard, picking apples: and we could now and then hear the rustling of the branches, as he shook the ripe fruit to the ground.

"Nelly, dear," said Oscar, pausing from his work, — "what a pleasant life this is! I should never weary of it; — so peaceful and happy! If I could but see you a little more like the Nelly of old times, *nothing* would be wanting!"

And his honest, manly face, tinged with a shade of melancholy, that spoke of salutary grief now passed away, vouched for the truth of his words.

"Why," he continued, in a tone of regret, "*why* did I not sooner discern that this was the life for me? — not the gay, heartless one, I used to lead!"

"Ah! dearest Oscar, — it is not your changed *life*, but your changed *heart*, which, shedding its sunshine not only around but *within*, makes you happy! Two years ago this life would have been insupportable to you!"

"Perhaps it might," he replied, thoughtfully resuming his labours.

After awhile, he again paused.

"Nelly, dear — I wish you would leave off that sable robe; it only serves to remind you more forcibly of the past!"

"Nay, Oscar, I must always wear it; for any other would be out of harmony with my thoughts. The external garb should not be at variance with the *heart's* clothing; and mine is shrouded in a mantle darker than the one I wear!"

"Dearest Nelly! — it grieves me to hear you talk thus! You were not so hopelessly cast down, after the loss of your mother, and of your aunt!"

"No, Oscar; for I had the firm and reasonable assurance of meeting them again, in that better world for which my soul yearns — oh! how unceasingly!"

"Nelly — Nelly! you must not talk thus! If *you* were taken from me, the existence which is now so peaceful would become so desolate — oh! *so* desolate!"

And his voice faltered.

"Dear Oscar! I am very selfish, to cloud your happiness with my gloomy complaints: I will *try* to be more cheerful. And now, put on your coat, and let us see how Uncle George gets on with *his* work."

And, arm-in-arm, we strolled to the little orchard, where Uncle George, perched on a ladder, was still plucking the

apples, and shaking down those which he could not reach with his hand.

Up sprang Oscar into the tree, and down came a shower of apples which made Uncle George retreat in consternation; while I stood by, laughing, in spite of myself, at his attempts to storm the fortress, and regain possession of the ladder.

"Oh! Oscar! Oscar!" I suddenly exclaimed, "come down directly! I had almost forgotten a commission that I want you to execute. I want you to take something *directly* to Mrs. Hunter. Poor woman! she is ill, and in want of it."

"All right!" said Oscar, as he descended from the tree, and in so doing laid prostrate poor Uncle George, who, however, was extremely delighted at the accident — as, indeed, he was at anything that would "make poor Nelly laugh."

"Now, then, Oscar," I said, as we entered the house, "this is the basket."

Poor Oscar gazed ruefully at the hamper, the size of which exceeded his expectations.

"Sister Nelly, your 'baskets' increase in magnitude every time you honour me with a commission."

"Oh! you lazy fellow! As if you were such an exquisite as to fear being seen carrying a few things to a poor sick woman! Phœbe is out this evening, or she could have taken it. I would not have asked you to carry it along the road; but Mrs. Hunter's, you know, is only just across the field: you can go out through the orchard, and you will meet no one."

"Dearest Nell! As if I really objected to carrying your basket! As if I would not carry even the respectable Mrs. Hunter, in *propria personâ*, to any point of the known world, if such were your will and pleasure! Only, sister of mine, don't fancy for one moment that I am the dupe of your deep-laid schemes in my behalf! How is it that you always manage to send Phœbe on 'a little errand' whenever your 'small baskets' want to be taken anywhere? Dear Nelly," he added, with emotion, "I feel and appreciate all your unceasing efforts for my good; and, rest assured, you have not laboured in vain."

As he turned away, I marked the tear which glistened on his honest face, and blessed God that my care for my brother's happiness was not lost. In a moment he returned.

"Here I am, back again, like a bad penny! Just run into

the kitchen, Nelly, and bring out my satchel of tools. Mrs. Hunter's fence is broken, I remember, and I may just as well set it right before any stray cow or pig get in. I must go and bring the rake and hoe; for her garden is not in very good order. Thank you, dear. Now, don't expect me back for two hours."

. And he disappeared, whistling gaily as he went.

How my heart swelled in gratitude to the Great Being who, through ways which to my blind, human heart had seemed inscrutable, had changed the selfish worldling into the sincere Christian! Truly had he said, that I had not laboured in vain. Many were the instances of his kindness to the poor, which, without his knowledge, reached my ears. Many bruised spirits did he heal, and guide into the narrow path which leads to life eternal.

While I was still walking slowly to and fro in the little garden, Phoebe returned, and handed me a letter; and as I read it, a flood of bewildering joy and gratitude rushed into my heart. It was as follows:—

"MY DEAR, DEAR CHILD,

"I have great and overpowering news for you; and you will have need of all your calmness and self-possession to enable you to bear it. What, if I have heard of the poor lost one? Be calm, Nelly, be courageous; for you cannot imagine what I am about to tell you. What, if the fugitive you traced to Dover was *not* your sister? What, if she directed her flight in another direction—escaped the storm, and that which would have been far worse than the mere death of the body—spent the last two years in penitence and sorrow—and then returned, her health and spirits broken, to the scene of her early happiness, to the peaceful village where her innocent childish days were passed? There she awaits you, and you may once more clasp her to your heart. I have, unknown to her, written to summon you.

"Oh, Nelly! bless the All-Powerful for having preserved her in innocence and purity, and for having touched her heart with remorse—true and deep—for her past errors! Ah! thank God that, though she was most weak and unstable, she did not fall irretrievably! But I must tell you what I have learnt.—When Elmore, basely taking advantage of her terror

at the thought of her husband's return, hurried her into the chaise, she was too bewildered to understand the full import of that act. Not for one moment did it occur to her that she was flying *with him*. In a few moments, however, her instinctive purity told her what her reason — clouded and obscured by extreme terror — had failed to do: she felt the impropriety of her position, and entreated him to leave her, and to allow her to continue her flight alone. His answer may be imagined. She then implored him to take her to you. He represented to her that Oscar would naturally seek her there first of all. He added, that he would not in any way annoy her by his presence; but that it was absolutely necessary that he should take her somewhere for safety till the first violence of her husband's wrath had subsided. All this while they had been rapidly driving towards the wharf, where lay a steamboat, bound for Holland. Unaccustomed to act for herself — puzzled — bewildered — she implored that, as they were in the neighbourhood of her old nurse's dwelling, he would take her also. At first, he refused; but finding Edith inflexible, and fearing to exasperate her by further opposition, he consented, and Mrs. Goodrich went with them: Edith having first promised, however, that she would not exchange one word with her old friend till they were clear of the river — nay, he even exacted her *oath* to that effect. — But if I write more, I shall be too late for this post, and you will be delayed in coming. I need not tell you *how* your presence will be welcomed by the poor sufferer; for she is sadly in want of all the love and care you can bestow on her — utterly spiritless and heart-broken.

“ Your sincere friend,

“ REGINALD PERCIVAL.”

“ Thank God! Thank God! I should have had more faith in Him!” burst from my over-loaded, grateful heart.

Having rapidly explained to Uncle George the reason of my departure, I started on my journey. What terrible excitement was mine! What utter bewilderment! What joy, too deep for words! As I rapidly flew over the ground, the rate at which I was travelling seemed to my impatient longing to be but a snail's pace. What an age of thought did I live through in that time! What hopes and fears alternately

struggled for the mastery ! What plans did I not form for my darling's future life ; for I knew that she would never again leave me—never—never !

The journey was drawing to a close. Only three more stages !—two !—one !

We stopped before the humble dwelling where lived Mabel and her family. Mr. Percival opened the carriage door, and, gently lifting me to the ground, supported my trembling steps. I entered, and for an instant, paused on the threshold. Then, there was a piercing scream, and the arms were wildly stretched towards me. In another moment she was strained passionately to my heart !

Then I gazed upon her — upon her who was once my pride — my glory ! Alas ! where was now the dazzling beauty — the alluring grace — that once dwelt there ? Gone — gone ! — I beheld only the wreck of the once brilliant and fascinating Edith Dudley ! Sharp lines of care, and — I shuddered to think of it — *want* ! had ploughed their furrows on the smooth brow and — alas ! no longer rounded — cheek ! Her form had lost its pliancy, and had become emaciated to a degree that made me tremble. Her eyes — those large, full, earnest eyes ! — remained the same, save that a tinge of deep and hopeless grief had even increased their marvellous beauty. As she lay in my arms, and as I gazed, in bitter grief, on the wreck of so much loveliness, I yet felt that I would rather have her so than as I had seen her in her own brilliant home ; and I thanked God that He had restored her to me — not in the full blaze of her enchanting youth and beauty — but with her beauty — that great source of temptation — gone, her pride crushed — the weight of years upon her young, fair brow ; — for I felt, that thus alone could she have been snatched from the gulf which had yawned to receive her.

I sat down beside the little couch, and drew her sweet sad face to my bosom, and, after a while, she slept ; yet she still firmly clasped my hand, as though she feared to lose me. When she awoke, it was night ; and the little lamp shed its feeble rays upon her attenuated form, softening the sharp outlines, and making her look more like the Edith of years past. I did not know she was awake, till I felt my hand pressed to her lips, and bedewed with her falling tears. Stooping, I kissed her brow.

“ Nelly — can you still love me ? ”

"Oh ! my darling ! my treasure !" I answered, in a voice of mournful reproach.

She clasped her arms round my neck, and broke into a passionate fit of weeping. After a while, she spoke, in her own sweet, plaintive voice, broken by her tears and sobs.

"I must tell you all — all !"

"Nay, my own darling — another time, not now; you are too weak."

But she persisted. "Yes, Nelly — it will do me good. I can't bear that you should think of me as — as I know you do."

A fresh fit of sobbing impeded her utterance. For awhile she was silent: then, with more composure, she resumed —

"I must begin long before that terrible night——. But first, Nelly, will you promise — *promise* that nothing I am going to tell you shall make you cease to love me ?"

"My darling !" I answered, fondly smoothing down the braids of her still beautiful hair; "my darling ! — as if that were possible !"

"Then I will tell you all ! Nelly — from the time I was a little child I loved *you* better than all the world; I did indeed ! But there was *one* person whom I loved still more — and that was, *myself*; and to the gratification of my own vanity and self-love, I sacrificed even *you* — my dear, good, generous sister ! Nelly, I knew your love for Oscar; and yet, my vanity prompted me to try to win him. He loved *you* — you alone; yet he fell into my snare. At first, I had no thought of winning more than his passing admiration; but I gradually went on from one step to another, till — you know the rest——"

"Yes, my darling — and do not regret it. Continue."

"Nelly — Oscar never loved me ! He married me from a *sense of honour*. He gave me his *hand*; but his *heart* was with *you*. He was proud of the admiration I excited; but beyond that, he cared not for me; and my self-love was piqued by his neglect. I felt that he considered me a mere plaything, to be admired and spoilt, — not, a companion, to be made the sharer of his most secret thoughts. Alas ! I felt but too sure that those thoughts were with you, and that his happiness was ruined when he lost you for ever ! Then, Nelly, when I was most pained at his neglect, I met *him* — that determined, unscrupulous villain ! From the moment he first saw me, he was

bent on my destruction, and left no means untried to accomplish it. Finding that my vanity, alone, was insufficient to aid him, he tried—and successfully too—to arouse my jealousy, by telling me of my husband's infidelities. And thus he managed to work his way into my confidence, until I learnt to rest upon him, instead of upon the husband to whom, before God, I had pledged my faith. At that time, dear Nelly, I was most wretched; for my conscience ceased not to upbraid me. I dared not meet your pure and searching glance, and therefore shunned your presence. When I *did* try to shake off his influence, and to recall *you* to my side, he stood between us, and, I have since learnt, prevented your admission to the house. At last the blow fell, and my unpardonable levity received its chastisement. He one day sent me a letter, which, by mistake, was conveyed to my husband! Discovering his error in time (would to God he had not!)—Elmore resolved to profit by it. He rushed into my presence, and so vividly represented to me what would be the terrible wrath of my husband, that, to avoid it, I, half mad with terror, fled with him! I had no thought of harm;—the full import of what I was doing never occurred to me;—I only meant to fly from the terrible storm that awaited me. He told me that he should take me on board a steamer bound for Rotterdam; and, with much trouble, I persuaded him to let dear old nurse go too. But he made me promise not to speak to her till we should have left the Thames. So we started, and the boat was soon rapidly steaming down the river, bearing me away from all that I loved and cared for, every moment rearing a stronger barrier between me and happiness, and strengthening the chains which bound me to the villain whom I now began to regard in his true character. Then I thought of you, my sister; and all the lessons you had taught me came back to my thoughts; and I felt a great horror of what I was doing, and of the wretch who was tempting me on to guilt; and I determined to leave him, and to fly to you, never to quit you more. With a great effort I reached the deck, and besought him, with piteous entreaties, to restore me to all I cared for,—to my sister—my adopted mother—aye, even to my husband's furious rage. For awhile, he attempted to soothe me by soft and caressing words, and by promises of eternal fidelity.—I told him that I loathed his affection; and I shrank, in terror and disgust, from his

attempted consolation. He then reminded me, that it was too late to return home; for that my husband would discover my flight, and would never again receive me into his house.—I said, that my sister would receive me, and that I could bear a disgraced *name*, if my *conscience* did not upbraid me; and again I entreated him to set me free, adding, that if he did not, I would find means to escape. At this, he became furious, and swore, with a terrible oath, that, if I did, he would follow me, and find me out, though it were at the world's end;—aye, that he would pursue me, through years and years, and retake me at last! Terrified at his violence, and at his awful threat, I again sought the cabin. By this time we were out of the river; so I went to nurse, and told her all."

"Yes," interrupted Mrs. Goodrich, who had crept in while Edith was speaking; "yes—and the poor lamb clung round my neck, and cried as if her heart would break, and entreated me to save her. The heartless wretch—to mislead such an innocent, trusting darling! He had told me that Mr. Oscar was in Holland, and had begged him to bring Mrs. Herbert over to join him; and he said—the villain!—that she was displeased at having to go before the season was quite over. And then he dared to say, that he was afraid she was not quite right in her mind; for that she'd sometimes refuse to speak to any one for days together, and that, after that, she'd talk quite wildly, and accuse people of all sorts of dreadful things! I couldn't—and wouldn't—believe it, and went to my darling, and asked her why she was so sad. But she wouldn't answer a word, and kept moaning, and crying, and clinging to me. But, when we were out of the river, and she told me all, I saw through him, and told him so. He tried to make me believe it was only one of her odd tales; but I wasn't going to be taken in like that!"

"And then," said Edith, "the wind rose, and the sailors began to prophesy rough weather; and everything was lashed fast, in anticipation of a gale. The wind increased with frightful power; and the sea rose in terrible fury. Hour after hour did the labouring vessel struggle with that most fearful storm. The thunder crashed, and the lightning threw its awful glare over the anxious, terrified faces around me, while the screaming wind sounded to me like a chorus of malignant fiends, rejoicing in my agony and terror. Now and then a mighty sea would sweep over the ship, threatening to engulf her;

then she would struggle forth, stand still for a moment, and again bound madly on to meet the next wave. And he—the dastard!—Wild—half mad with terror for *himself*—not for *me*—he raved, and stormed, and cursed me—*me*—as the cause of his being there!—and—but I have forgiven him now! Oh, Nelly! what I have to tell is horrible—most horrible!”

She paused for an instant, and shudderingly closed her eyes. Then she resumed:—

“He would not remain below; so the sailors lashed him on deck. Soon after, there was a wild shriek—heard, even above the raging of the storm. Two men had been washed overboard! but *he* was not one of them. Then—oh! it is so horrible!—so horrible! Tell it, nurse.”

“Then,” the old woman continued, “in a little while there was an awful crash. The mast had gone!—and, when the vessel righted from the shock, there was one man less on deck; and that man was—Elmore!”

My poor darling breathed a deep sigh of relief, as though she experienced over again the deliverance that fearful death had afforded her. For some time we were silent; then she went on.

“For two days we continued to battle with the storm. Ah! what was that *outward* conflict of the elements compared with the tempest of remorse that rent my heart! During those two days I lived a life-time of penitence and shame; and I made a solemn vow to the Almighty, that, since it had pleased Him to save me from guilt, the rest of my life should be devoted to His service. At last the wind began to abate, and the sea, instead of leaping and fighting, in furious, maddened waves, swept along, in great, undulating swells, like rolling mountains; and thus, on the fourth day from our departure, with mast gone, and machinery damaged, we approached the terrible bar of sand which lies at the mouth of the Maas. How we escaped destruction I know not; for the vessel rolled as if she would go over; and terror and despair were in every face. They said that a boat less seaworthy would never have lived through it. Ah! they did not reflect that the Great Being, whose mercy had saved us through the raging storm, was able to lead our shattered bark through the eddying surge! We had crossed the surf—we were in smooth water! and then I fell upon my knees, and fervently—oh, *how fer-*

vently!—thanked the God whose aid you, from my very childhood, had taught me to seek!”

“My poor darling—you are wearing yourself out! Let nurse tell the rest,” I interrupted; for she had become very pale, and her voice was weak and broken.

Mrs. Goodrich continued:—

“Well, we landed safely, thank God! And then she gave way, and fell ill—poor dear!—and, once or twice, I thought I should have lost her!”

Edith interrupted.

“But at last I recovered; and, six months after my fatal—fatal departure, I sailed for England. I yearned inexpressibly to see you, my dear, dear sister, and thought, with saddened pleasure, on our approaching meeting, which I now regarded as speedy.

“With what joy and gratitude did I set foot upon the ground where dwelt all whom I loved! We drove to within a short distance of H——, and then walked the rest of the way. It was on a cold, bitter evening in January, that I approached the dear little cottage——” Her voice faltered. “Telling nurse to wait for me at a little distance, I went round by the back way, and entered the garden, that I might have one look at you before you knew I was there. The curtains were not yet drawn; and, looking through the window, I saw you and Oscar seated before the fire. You were clad in deep mourning. Oscar’s face wore a look of peace and calm; but deep sadness had evidently been there. You were talking to him; and a gentle smile was on your face. I paused irresolutely. My poor, wronged husband—wronged, since, though I had committed no greater fault than levity, the world would not believe it, and his *name* was sullied—had sought an asylum with the friend and sister of his early days, from whom my vanity and self-love had separated him. If I entered that dwelling he would leave it; and where could he go? Should I again tear from him the friendship and sympathy of the only being who could cheer his dark lot? Ah! no. But then I looked at you, my sister,—and oh, how I yearned to cast myself in your arms! Yet, again, your sable garments betokened your belief in my death. Doubtless some story had been concerted to account for my absence, and to preserve the honour of my husband’s name. Perhaps he had given out that I had gone abroad with him, and had died there! Why

should I, by discovering myself, falsify that account, and bring disgrace on both him and you? I gazed once more on your dear, dear face, and then turned away! Since then I have been a wanderer. The sale of my jewels supported me for some time; but at last, even that resource began to fail me, and want now threatened to add its sharp goad to the misery—ah! how deserved—that I had before suffered.

“Ah, poor dear!” sobbed Mrs. Goodrich; “and then she took to teaching—God help her!—She that had never known what it was to have to move a finger for herself! Dear lamb!—she never complained, though I saw it was wearing her out. She would come home, of an evening, with her sweet smile, and would say, ‘Kiss me, dear old nurse; you are the only friend left to me now.’ And then she would cling round my neck, and sob as if her poor heart would break. And she was so good—not thinking of herself, the dear—but always mindful of me. If I looked sad or weary—as I often did at the sight of my darling’s poor, sorrowful face—she would try to laugh, and to make me laugh too; or she would take me out, and try to amuse me, in her way. And she would hang about me, and coax me to be happy——”

She stopped; for the remembrance was too much for her.

Edith took up the narrative.

“Ah, Nelly!—*then* I knew *what* it was to teach for one’s daily bread! *Then* I knew to what a fate you, for my sake, had resigned yourself! Oh, my ungrateful heart!—my ungrateful heart!”

“Hush, my darling—don’t sob so piteously. It is over; and you must forget it.”

“Forget it! Ah! if I *could* forget all that I suffered then! all the bitter, bitter remorse!—the unavailing regrets!—the longing—the inexpressible yearning—to behold, once more, you, and my poor trusting husband—to humble myself in the dust before you both, and implore your pardon! Returning home one evening I was taken so ill, that my life was for some time despaired of. At length I began to recover; but it was with a weight at my heart, and a feeling of disappointment at having still to bear this labouring burden of existence. My means were now exhausted; and, after the doctor’s claims had been satisfied, I found that hardly anything remained. At that time, but for *your* lessons, which have never been wholly erased from my heart, I should, by my own hand, have hastened

my departure from this life of misery and dread. I felt the hand of death upon me, and longed—oh, how intensely—to breathe my last in the scene of my early happiness and innocence. This longing at length became a passion—a madness—I could not resist it; and, at last, we started on foot, destitute—penniless. It was a weary journey; but at length we reached the dear little village, and I fell down, fainting, at this door. When I recovered, Mr. Percival, for whom nurse had sent, was beside me.

“Oh! my sister! my sister! what do I not owe to you? But for your persevering love and care, what might I not have become? It was you who taught me to hate vice, and to feel, through all my follies and vanities, that God was watching me; and not one of the lessons which you tried to teach me—not one of the efforts you made to save me—has been lost! Nelly, Nelly, under God, you have saved my soul!”

And she cast her arms round my neck, and nestled there.

Poor wanderer, she had at last found her home!

And amidst the tears and sobs which the recital of my dear one's misery had wrung from my agonised heart, I could but add, lifting my hands towards Heaven:—

“Truly, I have ‘cast my bread upon the waters, and it has returned unto me after many days.’”





The voice of years gone by!
It steals across my brain,
Low, soft, and sweet as evening breeze,
Which through the whispering aspen trees
Floats in a dying strain.

Scenes of the past! so lost, so loved —
The joys, the griefs, the fears;
The hope-lit smiles, the wasting glooms,
Old memories buried in the tombs
Of long-departed years.

NUMBERLESS were my plans for my sister's future life; and never was I weary of dwelling in anticipation on the happiness that we should together enjoy. One day, when I was thus expressing myself to her, she interrupted me:—

“Nelly, God knows that I would fain linger with you yet awhile, to prove to you, dearest sister, how sincere is my repentance — how deep my humiliation. Fain would I lead a life of active devotion in the service of Him whose wonderful mercy and forbearance have followed me through my rebellious career. But, dearest Nelly, it may not be.”

I started.—“Oh! Edith, darling, you will not leave me again!”

She smiled with inexpressible sadness.—“Ah! Nelly, would that I *could* remain, to prove to you through long years how dearly I love you! — how dearly!”

She broke into passionate sobs, and then added, in faltering accents:—“But, dearest, my lamp is nearly burnt out, and soon will be extinct. I feel it—I know it! Each day I become weaker, and find myself drawing nearer to my last

resting-place! My wanderings have worn me out. I shall never rally—never! Oh! Nelly, my darling! my life! don't weep so—I can't bear it!" and she strained me wildly to her heart. "Think what would have been my existence had I been permitted to remain with you! How could you have borne to see me—*me*, your little Edie, of whom you were so proud, and whom you still love so much—don't you?"—(oh! the dear, innocent, pleading face, that was raised to mine!)—"how could you have borne to see me a mark for scorn and reproach? And poor Oscar, whose life is now so happy, would then have to leave you, and his consolation would be taken from him! Ah! it is better thus! And yet," she added, mournfully, "would that I could yet be with you a few short years! But God knows best!"

When the doctor made his daily call, I drew him aside, and anxiously entreated that he would let me know the worst. Edith's terrible words received his confirmation:—she could not live! Those two years of hardship and misery, borne by one who had been nursed in luxury, had sapped her vital energies; and she was worn out. He added, that the utmost quiet and freedom from excitement might prolong her existence for a little while; but that she was sinking fast, and that her ultimate recovery was hopeless.

I bowed my head submissively, and again sat down beside my darling's couch.

"Nelly," she said to me, the next day, "I should be much happier if I could think that my selfishness and ingratitude had not ruined your prospects—" She paused, but soon resumed:—"Dear sister, are you quite sure that you told me the truth on my wedding morning, and that you had really ceased to love Oscar?"

And she gazed wistfully in my face.

"Quite sure, dearest love; nay, more than that, I have long bestowed my heart elsewhere."

A sun-beam seemed to have kissed her brow, so clear and joyous did it become.

"Then, Nelly, why are you not married?"

"Because," I answered, bitterly, a deep glow suffusing my face, "because he no longer loves me. His love is given to another. Once it was mine, and I knew not all its value. I mistook the false for the real gem, and rejected a treasure of priceless worth. Ah! could I but recall that deed!"

"Dearest, tell me of whom you speak."

"I cannot, dear child."

"Oh! Nelly, can you not tell it to one just entering the gates of death? Ah! tell me, I beseech you!"

She was becoming excited. To soothe her, I replied, "If you insist upon it——"

"I do! I do!"

"Then," I said, in a low, tremulous voice, "it is Mr. Percival."

"Oh! I am glad! I am glad!" she murmured, in her soft, sweet, musical tones. "He will make you happy — *so* happy, that the rest of your life will efface the memory of the past. Thank God!"

Not wishing to deceive her, I remained silent; and soon after, with a bright smile upon her face, she slumbered. That evening she startled me by saying —

"Nelly, do you think Oscar would come to see me before I die?"

"I fear not, my poor darling."

"But, Nelly, he *must*! I *must* see him!"

I gently drew her towards me, and, kissing her heated brow, said —

"He *shall* come, even though I myself go to bring him here. Be calm, my darling, for Nelly has promised it. When did she ever break her word?"

That night, while she slept, I wrote to Oscar, told him Edith's tale, proved to him that she had been guilty of no greater faults than levity and imprudence, and, after reminding him that it was his duty as a Christian to forgive even greater wrongs than those he had suffered at her hands, begged, as a favour to *myself*, that he would come without delay. Much more I added; and when I conveyed my letter to the post, I said within myself, "He will come."

The next morning my sister was feverish and uneasy; so I gave her a sedative, and then, when she had fallen into a deep sleep, left nurse sitting beside her, and went out for a minutes' fresh air; for my aching head and wildly-beating heart warned me, that, if I would nurse my darling to the end of her sad pilgrimage, I must husband the little strength that yet remained to me.

As I left the house, I encountered Mr. Percival, who was coming to make his daily inquiry after the health of the poor

sufferer. Hearing that she slept, he offered to join me in my walk; and for some time we proceeded in silence.

Instinctively, I directed my steps towards Aunt Mary's cottage. How pretty and fresh it looked! But strange faces were at the window; and with a heavy sigh I turned away, and walked up the lane towards Rocklands.

"We can go in, if you like," said Mr. Percival; "the house has been untenanted for some time."

So we entered the large gates, and walked up the stately avenue. What memories of the "long ago" did it recall! of the time when we had driven through it—"the grand people at the great house," as the cottage children used to call us! I seemed still to hear the merry, ringing laughter of my little sister—her mamma's spoilt idol! I saw myself—a mute, melancholy child—wishing, oh! how sorrowfully! that I, too, had a mother to respond to my joy, and to call forth such heart's merriment as resounded by my side. I pictured myself watching my dear Aunt Mary's face, to catch the glance of the soft blue eyes which now and then turned so lovingly upon me, and to draw from them the hope and comfort which cheered me through many a trying hour.

Then, later, I fancied myself happy and caressed—my life unruffled by a single cloud—riding gaily down that avenue, with Oscar by my side. It was too much; and as we entered the house, my eyes were dim with tears.

I went through all the rooms with a heavy, breaking heart. The pretty morning room, where Edith had lain on the couch after her illness; the large drawing-room, where she and I had had such merry games in the winter evenings; the very chair in which we had both sat, when, with her arms round my neck, and her little face pressed close to mine—her large glowing eyes dilating with wonder and excitement—she had listened while I read to her her favourite fairy tales. Brushing away a tear, I hastily quitted the room, and mounted the stairs. Entering my former study, I expected to find it the same as of old;—I forgot that all the old furniture had been moved to my present room, and that nothing but the bare walls remained the same in this; so I turned away disappointed. But when I entered the little chamber where my innocent darling had slumbered in her youth and purity, it all fell with a crushing weight upon my heart, and I sobbed forth passionately:—

"Take me hence! I cannot bear it! I cannot!"

Tenderly he drew me away, and with his soothing words and exquisitely gentle manner, infused such peace into my wounded spirit, that, as I approached the little cottage that contained my treasure, I was calm.

My poor darling! she was a child again in her utter helplessness, and leaning upon others; and I could sometimes almost bring myself to believe that our life had been a dream, and that she was still the little innocent babe of my early years.

She spoke in low, weak tones, and dwelt much upon the past; — not upon her *married* life, but upon that she used to lead at Rocklands.

"Nelly," she said to me that evening — "do you remember the story of little Innocence, which you used to read to me? I often thought of it, when I was wandering about in misery; and it seemed to me that her fate was typical of mine. Selfishness was *my* first great fault, and Vanity *my* bane! Alas! alas! even Infidelity threatened at one time to overpower me, — for my sins stood between me and God; but Truth was at last victorious, and Repentance has in the end brought me to the only true source of Salvation, — the Foot of the Cross!"

She clasped her poor, wan hands; and a smile of ineffable sweetness played on her lips.

Ah! could I still murmur at a fate which removed her from a world of suffering, to one where sin and sorrow are no more? Already, that "peace which passeth all understanding" shone in the dear, sad face — a foreshadowing of that state where "God Himself shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain."

On the third day a travelling chaise whirled rapidly through the village, and stopped at the door. My heart bounded; for Oscar stepped from it, and entered the cottage. When he appeared, Edith uttered a cry — half of joy, half of terror, — while I darted forward.

"Oh, Oscar!" I whispered, in tones of agonised entreaty, "be merciful to her! I forgave *you* all, though *my* wrongs were greater! — and she is dying! — she is dying!"

I need not have feared. — Softly, he approached the bed, and gazed upon the wreck of his once beautiful wife; then, the big tears slowly gathered in his eyes, and fell unrestrained,

and, gently stooping, he kissed the fair brow, as he murmured in a broken voice —

“Edith — my poor wife! — we were both to blame — I, the most; for I should have been your guide and counsellor! You were very weak, and you were entrusted to my care; but I neglected the charge that God had given into my hands, and *you* have suffered — ah! how terribly!”

The feeble arms were gently raised towards him, and, kneeling down, he drew them round his neck; — the sweet, childish face was laid upon his shoulder; — and so, I left them.

When I returned, some hours after, she slept, and her brow was radiantly happy. Still his arm encircled her; and he watched over her as a mother might have done over a poor, tender infant. His face was veiled in deep sadness, mingled with a look of stern determination, care, and anxiety, which had not been there before.

The next few days seemed to be of unalloyed happiness for my poor darling; and she often talked — a few words at a time — of all that happened at Rocklands when we were children; but she was evidently sinking fast, and not all our agony of love could prolong her existence.

On the fourth day after Oscar's return, we saw that a change had come over her. At times, her mind wandered; and her thoughts were then evidently occupied with the subjects on which she had been talking. She again fancied herself a child, at Rocklands; and, in memory, she ran over the events of all that happy time. At one moment, she clung to me wildly, crying —

“Oh! — the bull — the bull! — Nelly, save me!” Then her voice changed; and she murmured, sadly, “Poor Nelly! so ill! so ill! — Will she die?” and then, she half slumbered. Waking with a start, she beheld Oscar and myself, with Mr. Percival, standing over her. She passed her hand vacantly across her brow, and then, glancing from me to Oscar, said earnestly —

“Remember!”

“I will!” Oscar replied, in solemn tones; — “I promise it, before the Great God whose mercy and goodness have been so wonderful. — I promise it!”

And he raised his hands solemnly to Heaven.

She smiled — a bright and happy smile, — and then, turning to me, said —

"Nelly — dearest love — put my arms round your neck; for I cannot move them. — I think — I think — I am dying!"

I did as she desired, drawing her dear face to my bosom. After a little while she whispered —

"Read!"

Blinded by my tears, I could not see the pages; but I repeated from memory the beautiful hymn —

"What can relieve the troubled soul
When the dark waves of anguish roll,
When dangers press, when doubts annoy,
And foes are threatening to destroy?

All human succour then is vain
The human spirit to sustain;
Jesus, 'tis thine alone to ease
The suff'ring of such hours as these.

O teach us, in the trying hour,
To trust thy love, and own thy power,
To seek thee, though thou seem to hide,
And wait till mercy be supplied.

Though heavy be the load we bear,
Teach us on thee to cast our care;
And grace and strength from thee obtain,
Whose love brings comfort out of pain."

I ceased; but she faintly sighed out the word — "More!"

I could not continue; but Mr. Percival's full, clear voice, sounded through the chamber of death:—

"My heart is sore pained within me; and the terrors of death are fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me. And I said, O! that I had wings like a dove! for then I would fly away and be at rest.—Whom the Lord loveth He correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth."

But her mind again wandered; and I listened to catch the last words that fell from her lips.

"Mamma — don't be angry with poor Nelly! Dear Nelly! I won't be naughty again!"

She was quiet for some time; then, the lips again moved, but more feebly than before.

"Nelly — I'm so sorry I killed your little bird!"

Another pause; and then, she fancied that she was in her little cot, and that I was bending over her while she said her

childish prayer: and the sweet, plaintive voice, so small and weak, was like that of the baby Edith, — as she faltered the words —

“Pray, God — bless Mamma, and Aunt Mary; and pray God bless me, and dear, *dear* sister Nelly! — and pray God make me good! Nelly — kiss little Edie! Good night, dear Nelly — good night!”

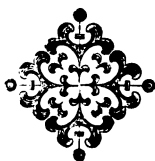
A bright ray — the light of reason and consciousness — flashed across her brow; and her eyes met mine.

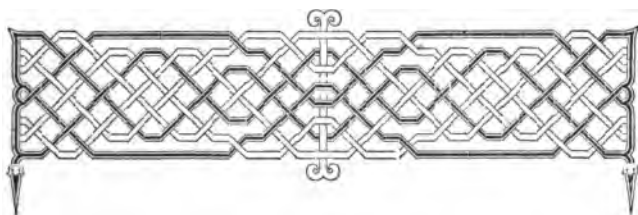
“Nelly!”

A smile played upon her lips; and her gaze never wandered from my face.

I held her clasped in my arms — her head still resting on my shoulder. Suddenly, they advanced to take her from me; and Mr. Percival tried to draw me away. I looked in their faces, and there read something that made me listen for her breath, and lift the hand which I had held round my neck. It fell heavily in my lap.

Oh, Edith — my heart's desire! Never more for thee shall there be tears of sorrow! Never more shall Nelly think of thee with shame! Rest — rest in the Lord!





Upon the silent shore I stand; in grandeur wild,
Uprise the rocks unalter'd since I was a child;
Where oft, with joy uncheck'd, I've chased the ebbing waves,
And gazed with fearful wonder on the sea-worn caves.
The light spray, sparkling, fell among my tangled hair,
Glittering, like diamonds on the brow of maiden fair.

But years have pass'd away since then, and now I *see*,
As well as *feel*, that there has come a change o'er me.
The mighty waters, onward dashing, still round me roar,
Breaking in foam upon the beach, as in days of yore.

When the fisher's children on the sand shout out their glee,
I can't but feel how great a change there is in me.
Paled is my cheek, feels not my heart the old emotion
That once it felt, whene'er I gazed on yon blue ocean.

But why repine? We must *endure*! do what we may;
Till from the shadowy grave arise the perfect day.
Then joy complete shall ever reign untouch'd by strife,
And to us clearly will be solved, the mystery — called Life!

WHAT happened, for weeks after, I knew not; but when I first awoke to absolute consciousness, I was in the Ashton's house, Lady Ashton was bending over me, and Minnie's arm was round my neck. I gazed on them in perplexity, and tried to speak; but my language was strangely incoherent, and I could not even *think* two consecutive words, much less pronounce them. Lady Ashton held a glass to my lips, and, after drinking from it, I slept.

Oh, that long, slow awakening to memory and reason, and to the consciousness of bitter grief! Months elapsed, ere I

was able to leave the couch; and, when I did so, I could but crawl feebly from one chair to another, like a helpless child, just learning to walk. Sometimes, I would have frightful outbreaks of despairing sorrow, which shook me terribly, and retarded my recovery. Twice I had a relapse, which so reduced my strength, that my life was for some time despaired of. In truth, the grief and anxiety of the last few years, and the terrible shock I had so lately had to bear, told upon me with crushing power.

Mr. Percival called daily, and spent as much of his time as he could spare with me; and his tender anxiety — his unremitting care — called forth my warmest gratitude.

At last, I was pronounced sufficiently convalescent to take gentle drives with Lady Ashton; then, I could walk a very short distance in the garden: and after that, my recovery was rapid.

Oscar had returned to H —, for a few weeks; my heart told me that he had gone to lay my darling, as she had begged he would, beside her mother in the little church-yard. When he came back he placed in my hands a little casket; I opened it, and found in it a long tress of fair, silky hair!

He shared with Lady Ashton and Minnie the task of watching and tending me; and never was woman more fond and gentle than Oscar. Deep sadness was on his brow, and it was evident that his loss had fallen with overwhelming force upon his heart. Yet the lines of stern, unflinching determination were blended with the evidence of his sorrow. He was more than sad; — he seemed heart-broken; and we feared that his grief was undermining his health; but he did not complain.

“Oscar, dear brother,” I said to him, “you are ill!”

He shook his head mournfully, as he replied, “My illness is not of the body!”

I gently took his hand, and looked into his face.

“Nay, dear Oscar — you should not mourn so hopelessly! Have you not every cause for gratitude, — since she was penitent? And yet, you suffer more than you did when you thought she had perished in guilt and hardness of heart, in the raging of that pitiless storm! You were cheerful and happy in the little cottage — and so you will be again, my brother!”

“Never! never!” he exclaimed, vehemently.

"Oh, Oscar! — don't say so! We can live as we did before; and my health is now so established, that I have fixed this day week for our return." (How my heart sank at the thought of it!)

Oscar started; then, sighing heavily, he left me.

Next morning the sun shone brightly, and the dew sparkled on tree, grass, and flower, as Mr. Percival entered, and asked me to go out with him. I looked at him in astonishment; for his face was radiant with happiness, his step was light and elastic, and, once or twice, he uttered the joyous laugh which I had not for years heard from him. It struck me that his marriage with Florence was now decided, and that his wonderful elation sprang from that cause. Deeply offended at such undisguised joy in presence of my bitter grief, and pained, more than I chose to confess, at the cause of it, I coldly declined to accompany him. He was not to be refused, however; — calling Lady Ashton to his aid, I was forcibly equipped, despite my cold, repelling looks, and then, he and my kind friends possessing themselves of my hands, I was almost dragged to the door, which Lady Ashton laughingly shut against me. Thinking that it would be undignified to offer any further resistance, I walked on towards Rocklands. He offered me his arm; I gently and politely declined it; whereupon he seized my reluctant hand, and, despite my resistance, drew it within his arm, and held it there. He was evidently determined not to take offence.

"Nelly — you are out of temper this morning!"

I indignantly denied the truth of the assertion, and told him that I considered him extremely rude.

He only laughed. "Yes, Nelly — you *are* out of temper, and I think it a good omen; they always consider it a proof of convalescence! I am really quite glad to see some of the old *Nelly* spirit in you once more; for I really feared that it was quite extinct!"

And again he laughed most provokingly.

"Mr. Percival," I said, abruptly stopping, and absolutely wrenching my arm from his, — "I will not go one step farther with you!"

"Yes, you will!" he said, in the same provoking tone.

"Why?"

"Because" — and his whole manner changed to one of deep feeling — "because I ask it as a *favour*; and I know you will

not refuse to gratify an old friend, who has always sought your happiness before his own."

I again placed my hand within his arm, saying, in an agitated voice:—

"You have indeed been a friend to me! I shall never have such another!"

And we walked on in silence. Insensibly we entered the deserted grounds of the dear old house; and I thought I would take one look at my dear little bay, which I had never seen since our departure.

How peaceful and happy it looked, with the sun shining on its many-coloured pebbles, wet with the tiny waves that rippled so gently over them! What memories of old times came crowding upon me, as I gazed on the calm, blue sea, and the bright, unclouded sky! What visions of all those beloved ones—passed away! And, mingled with all, the sharp and bitter pang with which I thought of my approaching separation from this dear, but, alas! too lately valued friend!

He seated himself beside me, on one of the large rocks, on which, when a child, I used to play. He spoke:—

"Nelly, this sweet little spot is the one of all others that I would have chosen for what I am going to say." He paused. "Can you guess?"

Again I was beginning to feel annoyed; but I answered, calmly:—

"I think I can."

"Well—what is it?" he asked, with a half smile.

"You are about to be married," I replied, with a ruefully abortive attempt at cheerfulness.

"How very extraordinary that you should have guessed it!" he remarked, with a merry look. (My self-possession was rapidly melting away.) "Perhaps," he continued, "you can name the lady?"

I could *not* bring myself to mention *her* name; so I remained silent.

"Come—do!" he urged.

With a mighty effort—though, to my intense disgust, with a slightly quivering lip—I pronounced her name.

"Florence Elliot."

"Oh dear, no," he said, in a mocking tone; "this time you are not so fortunate in your guess."

"Not Florence?" I ejaculated, in utter bewilderment.

"No, 'not Florence'" (mimicking my accent); "at least, not unless you particularly desire it."

"Oh! no, no!" inadvertently escaped me.

"Then try again, and guess some *rather* more probable person."

A strange, wild hope was fluttering at my heart — and yet it seemed *too* much happiness — I dared not encourage it.

"Tell me," I said, faintly; "I cannot guess."

"But you *must* guess," he persisted. "You would be angry if *I* were to name the lady; for you once made me promise never again to mention her to you; and" — his manner changed, and he spoke in a low, earnest, trembling voice — "and through pain and grief such as you have never suspected, I have kept my word, Nelly; for I thought it made you happy."

I gazed in his face with intense earnestness, and with an excess of bewildered joy. He took my hands.

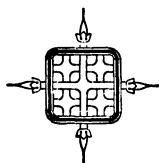
"Nelly, it is for you to say who shall be my wife. Speak!"

Then, with head bowed down to conceal the blushes that rose from my happy heart, I murmured the words that made me his; and as we sat there in the little bay, the calm sea and gentle air were not so unruffled as our souls.

Long did we linger there; and as he fondly drew my no longer reluctant hand within his arm, and stooped to kiss it, and as I met the gaze of those true loving eyes bent tenderly on mine, I murmured —

"My trials are surely ended! I have found the haven of peace whence I strayed so long ago!"

And neither of us spoke — we were too happy.





Then before all they stand — the holy row
And ring of gold,
Bind her as his.

ROGERS.

It was a delicious evening, towards the end of July: and Oscar and myself were walking in the meadow that bordered our little garden. Poor Oscar! those few months of sorrow and regret had changed him more than I could have believed. The sunken eye, the care-worn brow, the thin sprinkling of grey amongst his once rich and luxuriant hair — all betokened a grief too deep for words, gnawing, like the bird of prey in the old legend, unceasingly upon his heart. And yet he complained not — seemed to take the same interest as before in all around — and, at times, appeared not only cheerful and happy, but actually gay.

And we walked to and fro, as I have said, in the pleasant meadow, talking of all the old days, and feeling that it was the last time we should be able to do so for a long while; for this was my wedding eve.

"And oh! Oscar," I said, gratefully, "I can never forget that to *you* I owe a happiness such as I never hoped to attain. But for you, Mr. Percival would have allowed me to leave M—— without that explanation. God bless you, Oscar! for you have been a good friend to me!"

"Ah! Nelly, it was all I could do in reparation! Besides, remember that it was Edith who told me how I could serve you, and who solemnly charged me to do it. We both felt how deeply we had wronged you — how, but for us, your life might have been happy, and your prospects brilliant—" His voice faltered. "Come," he added, more cheerfully, "we had

better go in now; Mr. Percival must be very near by this time."

And soon after, Mr. Percival arrived.

I retired to my room to hold an important discussion with Blanche, as to all that was to be done in our absence on the wedding tour; for the furniture was to be transferred to our new house (the most exquisite cottage imaginable, with *such* a garden, and *such* views!), which was situated about a mile off — just a little way beyond the church-yard, where slept my mother, and Aunt Mary, and little Edie. I should have been well contented to remain in our present abode; but Mr. Percival would not hear of it. He said, that no sorrowful memories should interfere to mar the happy life which, with God's will, he had in store for me; and, that he was determined I should form fresh associations, which might supersede the old ones. Therefore, I was to have a fresh house, and a fresh garden, and a fresh view: and, as he had obtained the living of H——, our vicinity to the church was very desirable. Blanche and Percy were going to take our cottage off our hands, their own being two small for them. We had pressed Uncle George to live with us; but he had answered, that he could never endure the society of newly married people; but, that he would settle somewhere in our vicinity. Meanwhile, he had accepted Oscar's invitation to visit him at M——; for Oscar had resolved to return home, and to soothe the declining years of his parents, who anxiously yearned for the presence of their only remaining child.

What a strange breaking-up of old habits and associations did this seem to me! Even amidst such happiness as I had never thought to enjoy, a pang of regret would now and then dart through my mind, at the thought, that every vestige of the "long ago" would soon have disappeared.

As we sat there talking, we heard a sudden commotion below — the running of feet and clamour of voices; and my name was called, more than once. Hastily I descended the stairs, and found them all grouped round Oscar, who had fainted. I made them carry him to the open window, where the fresh air soon revived him. With a heavy sigh he unclosed his eyes, and they rested on me. A languid smile played upon his lips. As soon as he could speak, he said, faintly —

"I believe I have over-tasked my strength;—these weddings

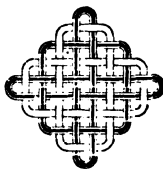
are very exciting events! I feel very weak.—Percy, good fellow, help me up-stairs;—a night's rest will set me up again, and I shall be ready for to-morrow's ——”

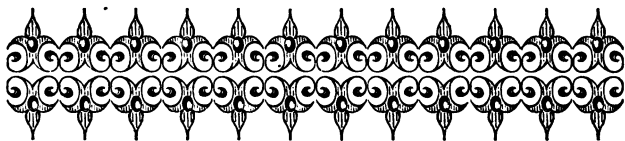
Again, the same languid smile; but a deadly pallor overspread his face.

“My dear brother — you *shall* not go with us to church!— You *shall* not! You are not in a fit state to leave your room!”

“Not get up on your wedding-day, Nelly? Not see you married, dear? That *would* be unnatural!”

And the next morning he was up the first in the house, and, with a merry laugh and quick step, was darting about, here there, and everywhere; so that I felt quite re-assured, and no anxiety on his account marred the happiness of that bright morning, when the solemn vows were interchanged, the ring was placed upon my finger, and I became Mr. Percival's wife.





Farewell hours that late did measure
Sunshine days of joy and pleasure:
Hail, thou gloomy night of sorrow,
Cheerless night that knows no morrow.

* * * *

O'er the past too fondly wandering,
On the hopeless future pondering:
Chilly grief my life-blood freezes,
Fell despair my fancy seizes.
Life, thou soul of every blessing,
Load to misery most distressing,
O how gladly I'd resign thee,
And to dark oblivion join thee!

BURNS.

LETTER FROM UNCLE GEORGE TO NELLY.

" Fernley, July, —.

"You have now been gone a fortnight, my dear; and really it seems an age, and I cannot help writing to beg for a few lines from you. Oscar and I arrived here but yesterday, owing to his serious illness, poor fellow! I thought he seemed much better the morning of the wedding; and when he received your last 'Good-bye, and God bless you!—Thank you for all you have done to make me happy!'—which I heard you say to him at parting; there was a sparkle in his eye, and a glow upon his cheek, which made me think that he had forgotten his own troubles in the contemplation of the happiness that he had created; and, as you drove away, he remained watching the carriage till it was out of sight. Then,

he turned slowly round, to enter the house; but suddenly, he staggered, and would have fallen, had I not caught him. I thought he was fainting; but, in a moment, the blood rushed from his mouth;—he had burst a blood-vessel! We carried him in, and undressed him. As we did so, a little book fell from his breast, and we found a small, silver coin hung round his neck;—both, no doubt, given to him by Edith, in her young and happy days. As he recovered, he sought them eagerly; and, the book being restored to him, he kissed it, as if unconsciously, and, placing it carefully under his pillow, fell asleep. He is now better; but his intense, hopeless misery, exceeds description. I fear that the wedding was too exciting for his shattered nerves, recalling to his memory—as it must have done—his own marriage, and his poor, lost wife. That he still thinks of her is but too evident; for he spends hours in wandering about the grounds of Rocklands; and I often find him seated in a little bay, with his eyes fixed immovably on the sea—his thoughts evidently with bygone years. I trust that his sense of religion, and his love for his parents, who are terribly anxious about him, will inspire him with energy to *live down* the memory of the past. Meanwhile, his sufferings are pitiable to witness; for, poor fellow! he seems quite broken-hearted.

“There is no news at M——. Oh! yes, by the bye.—What do you think?—Florence Elliot has married Miles Atkins, the apothecary’s apprentice; and her enraged parents have discarded her for ever, and have written to Percy and Blanche, to come and live with them. They, however, indulge no pleasant memories of M——, and have become attached to H——; so they have begged the old Elliots to come and reside in their neighbourhood, which, as they cannot bear the talking and jesting at their expense which Florence’s marriage has entailed upon them in M——, they have agreed to do. And so, Percy will still be a rich man, and will lose nothing by his fidelity to his cousin Blanche. Goodbye;—and if you don’t write me a long letter, you gipsy! in return for this marvellous piece of news, I’ll disinherit you!

“Your affectionate uncle,

“GEORGE MIDDLETON.”

With deep sadness did I read this letter, and thus learn, that the old associations, which had been so powerful for me,

still clung to poor Oscar's heart, and that his sufferings had sprung from a cause I had little imagined. I wrote to him — a loving, sisterly letter,— again breathing forth my heartfelt thanks and blessings for his goodness to me, and expressing my conviction, that he would in time find his reward in the peace and contentment which spring from a faithful discharge of duty. Much more I added; and, enclosing my letter in one to Uncle George, I despatched it by the next post.

Three weeks after, my husband received a letter from our uncle; and the border was of deep black. Mr. Percival wished to conceal it from me; but, with a terrible apprehension of the worst, I entreated him to read it. Then he drew me to his heart, and, holding me there, read the letter in low and mournful tones.

"H——, August.

"DEAR PERCIVAL,

"A terrible, and most unforeseen, event has happened; and you must break it to Nelly as gently as you can, for it will grieve her sadly. Her old play-fellow, friend, and brother—poor Oscar—is no more!

"I told you, in my last, of his illness, and of his deep, unconquerable melancholy. Poor fellow! little did I guess the cause of either! As little did I know, that his heart was broken, and that, as he could never again be happy in *this* world, God, in His mercy, would shortly summon him to a better! After I wrote to you, he became weaker and weaker; yet he still persisted in wandering about the grounds of Rocklands, and he would spend whole hours in the little bay. There I would find him sitting, either with his gaze fixed upon the sea, or else, reading the little book of which I told you. I one day attempted to cheer him; but he said,—

"'Do not pity me; I deserve all that I am suffering, for I have brought it upon myself; but, through the mercy of God, those sufferings have been so blessed to me, that I have now the hope that, when I leave this world of darkness I shall enter into everlasting life.' Then he lifted his sad, care-worn face to heaven, and it was radiant with a joy, not of this world.

"Once I came upon him unexpectedly, and saw him gazing earnestly upon a little miniature that he held in his hand. Hearing my approach, he quickly concealed it. I received

Nelly's letters, and handed him the enclosed one addressed to him. Hastily snatching it, he left the room, and remained so long absent, that I became alarmed—as I always did when he was long out of my sight—lest he should have had a return of his illness. Before seeking him in the grounds I went to his room. The door was slightly ajar, and I entered. There I beheld poor Oscar, weeping convulsively over Nelly's letter, and over the miniature which I had before seen; the heavy sobs and groans which burst from his labouring heart, evincing a depth of uncontrollable anguish which I had not suspected. Silently I advanced, and, standing behind his chair, looked at the miniature. 'Great God!' I inwardly exclaimed, 'have mercy upon him!' For, in that innocent girlish face, with its large, earnest eyes, and rich, clustering curls, I recognised—changed and saddened as the original has since become—the portrait of Nelly! Now I could understand Oscar's hopeless grief, and appreciate the heroic sacrifice that he had made to secure her happiness. I laid my hand on his shoulder.

"'Oscar,' I said, 'though you have no hope in *this* world, God will so recompense your generous self-devotion, that He will remove you from this scene of misery and disappointment, to realms of eternal bliss! For, Oscar, you have proved yourself a hero—nay, more—a *Christian*!'

"His head fell upon my breast; and gradually his sobs ceased. At last he spoke.

"'I *know* that He will have mercy, and that I am fast hastening to that world where 'there is no marrying, nor giving in marriage.' But oh! think not that my grief is *all* bitterness! No, it is mingled with joy; for I feel that I have done all that I could to atone for the past, and that, by the sacrifice of all I cared for on earth, I have made her happy. For she thanks and blesses me for my share in her present fate; and her words fall with healing power upon my soul! Ah, no!—I am not *entirely* unhappy!'

"And, as he looked in my face, a bright ray crossed his brow—a sunbeam darting through the gloom of his clouded spirit. He continued:—

"'Yet I could not be so peaceful; did I not feel that the hand of death is upon me. I could not—oh! I *could* not—bear to live, and to see her, *now*!'

"He shuddered, and hid his face in his hands.

"'Oh! Uncle George! Uncle George!' he exclaimed, with a passionate burst of mingled sadness, regret, and despairing grief,—'we were so happy together in the little cottage! I could have been content to call her *sister*, so that no other had called her *wife*! But God knows best; and I shall soon, I humbly trust, be with Him, in perfect happiness!'

"He said these last few words in a voice of such touching gentleness and resignation, that I wept with him. Poor fellow! I never saw a heart so utterly broken! A few days after he said to me,—

"'Uncle George—promise me that I shall be laid beside my poor, neglected wife. It would comfort me to know, that, when *she* came to visit her sister's last resting-place, her feet would press the sod that covered me.'

"I promised.

"'And,' he resumed, 'for years—long years—through absence—estrangement—alas! I confess, through infidelity to her who gave them, *these* have been my companions!—let them rest with me in my narrow bed!'

"And he shewed me the little book, the silver coin hung round his neck, and the miniature; then, touching a spring in the case, it flew open, and he disclosed a long tress of dark brown hair, which he pressed to his lips, and then tenderly replaced. My tears were flowing unrestrainedly; and I promised faithfully to do as he wished.

"For the next few days he seemed to rally—nay, he even appeared serene and cheerful—and I began to entertain hopes that his life might yet be spared, and his peace of mind restored. Alas! alas! One morning he wandered out as usual, but, not returning at the end of some hours, we became alarmed, and went to seek him. With a terrible foreboding, I approached the little bay. The sun shone brightly upon the calm blue waters; and all nature was so full of life, that it seemed impossible death could be there. Somewhat re-assured, I gained the edge of the cliff, and, looking down, saw Oscar, stretched, as was his wont, upon the beach, his arms extended upon a ledge of rock, and his head laid upon them. I called to him; but, receiving no answer, concluded that he slept. Truly he slept! but it was that sleep from which he will never more awake in this world, till the last trump shall sum-

mon the earthly tabernacle to meet its happy inmate in realms of eternal joy!

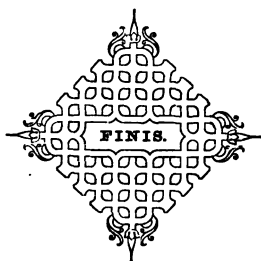
"The little book lay open before him — its leaves slightly agitated by the light breeze, which, playing with the tresses of his hair, gave him still the appearance of life. I took up the volume. It was a little, old Bible; and in the beginning were written, in a hand which I could still recognise, though the characters were somewhat childish and uncertain, the words—

'OSCAR, FROM NELLY.'

Clasped firmly in his other hand, and with his lips still pressed to it, was a lock of dark hair.

"Touched by this evidence of a love which, though once wayward and vacillating, had, at the last, been so true and deep, I wept; and for hours I sat there, with the poor head pillowed in my arms.

"His last wishes have been fulfilled; and, with the relics of his sad and hapless love, he sleeps beside his erring wife."



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